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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 20 JUNE 2025 | FRIDAY | BENGALURU | 23 DHU AL-HIJJAH, 1446 AH | Vol 4 | Issue No 166 | Pages: 8

Karnataka Cabinet raises housing quota for minorities from 10% to 15%

The government cited the high number of homeless individuals within minority communities as the reason for the increase **PHOTO: PTI**

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

The Karnataka Cabinet on Thursday approved raising the reservation for minorities in State housing schemes from 10 per cent to 15 per cent, addressing the significant number of homeless individuals in these communities. Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil confirmed that the revised quota will apply across all Housing Department schemes in both urban and rural areas.

Cabinet nod to health

The Cabinet also approved a cashless health scheme under the "Suvarna Arogya Suraksha Trust" for approximately 3,00,000 contract, outsourced, and honourarium government employees and their dependents. Employees will contribute Rs 100 monthly, with the government covering the remaining cost.

Primary healthcare services will be expanded in remote areas with a budget of Rs 15.97 crore. Additionally, the Apsarakonda-Mugali Marine Wildlife Sanctuary, covering 5,959 hectares along the Honnavar coast, will be officially declared.

Finally, a revised estimate of Rs 742 crore was approved for constructing the Anubhav Mantapa in Basavakalyana, Bidar—a socio-religious parliament founded by 12th-century reformer Basaveshwara—with completion targeted within a year. Previously, the cost was Rs 612 crore, adjusted for GST.

Bill for stampede

In legislative developments, a new bill on crowd control and management—prompted by the tragic Bengaluru stampede on 4 June, which claimed 11 lives—is set to be discussed in the next Cabinet meeting.

State Security Commission formed

Significant police reforms are underway with the formal constitution of the State Security Commission (SSC), following a High Court directive linked to a Public Interest Litigation.

The SSC, established under the Karnataka Police (Amendment) Act, 2012, complies with Supreme Court directions from 2006. Chaired by the Chief Minister, the commission includes the Home Minister, Leader of Opposition, a retired High Court judge, Chief Secretary, Additional Chief Secretary (Home), and the DG&IGP as Member Secretary. *—PTI*

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5 Assembly bypolls in 4 states largely peaceful

LUDHIANA/AHMEDABAD, 19 JUNE

Bypolls were held in five Assembly segments across Punjab, West Bengal, Gujarat and Kerala on Thursday, with the Kaliganj seat in West Bengal registering a polling percentage of nearly 70 by 5pm. Polling commenced at 7am and concluded at 6pm and was largely peaceful, with the exception of a few isolated incidents, officials said. At Kaliganj in West Bengal's Nadia, a voter turnout of 69.85 per cent was recorded till 5pm. *—PTI*

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SC report proposes Justice Varma's removal

NEW DELHI. 19 JUNE

High court judge Yashwant Varma, and his family members had "covert or active control" over the store room where a huge cache of half-burnt cash was found, proving his misconduct which is enough to seek his removal, a report of the inquiry panel probing the incident said. The three-judge panel headed by Chief Justice Sheel Nagu of the Punjab and Haryana High Court conducted the inquiry. The panel analysed the statements of 55 witnesses and Justice Varma and rendered its findings. It asked Justice Varma to explain the source of money which was found in the store room. It was critical of Justice Varma's daughter's testimony. *—PTI*

Khalistanis using Canada as launch pad, says report

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

It said a small group of Khalistani extremists are continuing to use Canada as a base for fundraising and planning of violence primarily in India, a report by Ottawa's intelligence agency has said. The report said ongoing involvement in violent activities by Canada-based Khalistani extremists continues to pose a national security threat to Canada and Canadian interests. The report appeared to clearly vindicate New Delhi's consistent position that pro-Khalistani elements in Canada have been carrying out anti-India activities with impunity. However, the report was also critical of New Delhi for what it called India's foreign interference activities in Canada. "In particular, real and perceived Khalistani extremism emerging from Canada continues to drive Indian foreign interference activities in Canada," it alleged. *—PTI*

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In a 1st, Trump says India, Pak leaders stopped war

Trump meets Munir, hosts Pakistan Army Chief for lunch

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, 19 JUNE

US President Donald Trump praised the "very smart" leaders of India and Pakistan for deciding to halt a military conflict that risked escalating into a nuclear war, marking the first time in weeks he refrained from taking credit for stopping hostilities between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

Speaking from the Oval Office after hosting Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, Field Marshal Asim Munir, for lunch at the White House on Wednesday, Trump said he was "honoured" to meet Munir, whom he described as "extremely influential" in ending the conflict on Pakistan's side.

Asked if Iran featured in discussions, Trump replied, "They know Iran very well, better than most, and they're not happy about anything." He added that Pakistan and Israel are both known to Munir, but the focus was on the broader regional situation.

Trump expressed gratitude towards both Munir and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who had recently left the US after talks. "Two very smart people decided not to keep going with that war. That could have been a nuclear war," he said, emphasising the gravity of the situation.

Since the start of hostilities following India's Operation Sindoor on 7 May, Trump had repeatedly claimed credit for mediating peace. However, Modi's office clarified that no US mediation or trade deal was discussed during the military operation and that the decision to cease hostilities was reached directly between India and Pakistan through existing military communication channels, initiated by Islamabad.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri reiterated that India rejects third-party mediation, a stance firmly supported across the political spectrum.

Ahead of the meeting, Munir invited Trump to visit Pakistan at a mutually convenient date. The White House lunch followed Modi's 35-minute phone call with Trump on the sidelines of the G7 Summit in Canada, their first conversation since April.

After four days of intense drone and missile exchanges post-Operation Sindoor, India and Pakistan agreed on 10 May to halt the conflict, averting further escalation. *—PTI*

PM Narendra Modi on Wednesday told US President Donald Trump that Delhi will not accept US mediation with Pakistan **PHOTO: GEMINI**

US may strike Iran in next few days: Reports

WASHINGTON, 19 JUNE

Senior officials in the United States are getting ready for a possible military strike on Iran in the coming days, according to a Bloomberg report on Wednesday. President Donald Trump is reportedly considering a US strike on Fordo, an underground uranium enrichment facility in Iran, the BBC reported.

Sources indicated a possible weekend strike, but plans are still evolving, the Bloomberg report said.

Similarly, the Wall Street Journal had also reported that Trump, earlier in the week, approved a military attack plan targeting Iran but withheld the final authorisation because he thought Tehran would meet his demands.

Meanwhile, a major US air base in the Middle East has seen many of the aircraft typically on its tarmac dispersed this weekend. This comes after ships off the US Navy's 5th Fleet base in Bahrain were also dispersed, and US began evacuating its officials from Iran.

Israel strikes Iran's heavy water reactor

Israel has attacked Iran's Arak heavy water reactor. The report said there was "no radiation danger whatsoever". *—PTI*

Iran hits Israel's stock exchange

On Thursday, Iran launched dozens of ballistic missiles targeting several locations across Israel, including Tel Aviv and Be'er Sheva. The Tel Aviv Stock Exchange building was extensively damaged, while a major hospital in southern Israel, Soroka Hospital in Be'er Sheva, also sustained hits. At least 32 people were injured, according to Israel's Magen David Adom rescue service. *—PTI*

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HC HALTS PROBE IN ENCROACHMENT CASE AGAINST HDK

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

The Karnataka High Court on Thursday granted interim relief to Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy by putting a temporary hold on the Special Investigation Team (SIT) inquiry into alleged land encroachment in Kethaganahalli village in Ramanagara district.

The SIT was constituted by the state government in January 2025 to examine accusations of Kumaraswamy's involvement in illegal land occupation.

The former chief minister moved the High Court, questioning the procedural foundation of the investigation team.

Pointing out that no official notification accompanied the government order establishing the SIT, the high court stayed the SIT's formation and the summons issued to Kumaraswamy until the matter is heard further. The ruling comes as a notable reprieve for the JD(S) leader, who has alleged political vendetta behind the SIT action.*—PTI*

BACK HOME SAFELY

An Indian student offers the national flag to her mother upon returning from Iran via Armenia under an evacuation operation facilitated by India, at Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi on Thursday; A total of 110 students from the Kashmir Valley arrived in the capital from Iran **PHOTO: PTI** *>>>More on Page 4*

Hurt feeling can't stop movies, comedy: SC

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

The Supreme Court on Thursday directed the Karnataka government to act against those obstructing the release of Kamal Haasan starrer 'Thug Life' in the state and said a flick, stand-up comedy or a poem's recital cannot be stopped only because someone's sentiments are hurt.

A bench of Justices Ujjal Bhuyan and Manmohan said, "There is no end to hurting sentiments in India. If a stand-up comedian says something, sentiments are hurt and there is vandalism. Where are we heading? Does it mean because of protests, a flick should be stopped?" The top court then recorded government's assurance that it would provide adequate security to cinema theatres screening the film. *—PTI*

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India to send damaged Black Box to US

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

India will be send the heavily damaged black box of the doomed Air India Boeing 787 Dreamliner aircraft to the United States for analysis, a source said.

The recorder was found two days after the crash.

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB)'s will extract the data from the Digital Flight Data Recorder (DFDR) at its laboratory in Washington and share its findings with India's Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB).

The NTSB team will carry them to their lab under protection and supervision from Indian officials, the source told The Economic Times.

Meanwhile, the United Kingdom's Air Accidents Investigation Branch will also be part of the investigation.

Data extracted from an aircraft's black boxes is essential to locate the cause of the crash. The flight data recorder provides insight into multiple technical parameters, though it may take two days to months to extract the data, depending on the extent of damage to the blackbox. *—Agencies/PTI*

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GOVT MULLS RELIEF

Worried about falling prices, mango trader dies of heart attack

DEEPTHI R KOLAR
SRINIVASAPUR/ BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

A mango trader who had invested at least Rs 30 lakh to buy crops died of a heart attack at a farm in Srinivasapur. Mango prices have been crashing since the Andhra Pradesh government banned mangoes, and amid the Middle East crisis, a region that is a major exporter of mangoes.

The deceased mango trader is **Mohammed Shafiulla**, 55, a resident of Srinivasapur and owner of Taj Mango mandi. He had purchased crops from farmers in Rojenahalli, Thotli and other villages and had also invested in pesticides. His nephew Anees Ahmed said Shafiulla had just finished moving almost two tractor loads of mangoes at a farm in Thotli when he died of a heart attack. Ahmed, who is also the Secretary of Mango Traders Association of Srinivasapur, said his uncle was afraid of not being able to pay for pesticides and labour. Anees urged the government to announce support price. "Had the government taken a decision earlier, the tragedy would not have happened," he added. President of Kolar Mango Growers Welfare Association, Chinnappa Reddy, added that many traders lend money to farmers hoping for profit. A

11L tonnes of mangoes produced by Karnataka in a year

The Karnataka Cabinet said it will exert pressure on the Cente to provide relief for mango growers. The Cabinet discussed the plight of mango growers, especially in Kolar, Chikkaballapura, Bengaluru Rural and Mumbai-Karnataka region. *—Salar News*

Hoax bomb threat triggers panic at KIA

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

Bengaluru's Kempegowda International Airport was placed on high alert after a bomb threat email was received on Wednesday night. The message, sent under a terrorist alias, warned of two bombs—labelled "Plan A" and a fallback "Plan B"—with one allegedly hidden inside a toilet pipeline. Airport security and bomb disposal units conducted a thorough sweep of the premises. Following extensive checks, no explosives were found, and the threat was declared a hoax. Police have registered a case and launched an investigation to trace the origin of the email. Authorities are treating the incident seriously amid a spate of recent hoax threats targeting key infrastructure across India. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

12 govt schools in Raichur to get science labs

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

In a bid to enhance science education in rural Karnataka, 12 government schools in Raichur district will soon receive fully equipped science labs and curated courseware aligned with state and NCERT curricula. This is part of the Kriya initiative by the Prayoga Institute of Education Research, aimed at transforming science learning for over 11,000 students across 77 schools. Now in its 10th year, Kriya focuses on experiential learning for pupils in Years 6 to 10, especially in government and rural schools. The effort in Raichur is supported by the SBI Foundation and SBI Funds Management Pvt Ltd. The initiative also includes a Teacher Empowerment Programme (TEP) with ongoing academic mentoring, under SBI Foundation's 'Reimagining Science Education' project. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

3-year-old twins fall into lake, die in Dharwad

DHARWAD, 19 JUNE

Three-year-old twins Muddasir and Muzmil from Yari Narayanpur village in Kundagol taluk, Dharwad, drowned in a lake near their home on Thursday evening. The boys had gone out to play as usual on their house premises when they accidentally fell into the lake. There were no people nearby at the time of the incident, delaying any immediate rescue. Kundagol police have registered a case and are investigating the circumstances surrounding the tragic accident. ***—Salar News***

GREEN THUMB

Minister Eshwar Khandre launched the World Environment Day programme organised by the Karnataka State Bioenergy Development Board at Kshemavana, Nelamangala, by planting biofuel saplings. At the event, Chairman SE Sudheendra detailed the State's upcoming bioenergy policy and its eco-friendly initiatives.
PHOTO: SALAR

BJP sees red as State hikes minorities' housing quota

Cong panel submits report on coastal K'taka communal tensions

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

The ruling Congress government and BJP clashed sharply after the State Cabinet on Thursday approved raising the reservation for minorities in State housing schemes from 10 per cent to 15 per cent. The government cited the high number of homeless individuals within minority communities as the reason for the increase.

Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil confirmed the decision, saying the revised quota would apply across all housing schemes run by the Housing Department in urban and rural areas. Housing Minister Zameer Ahmed Khan said the move aligned with long-standing demands from minority groups.

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar defended the decision, pointing to cities like Mandya and Bengaluru where many housing units remain unoccupied. "At least minorities are willing to occupy these buildings," he said, adding that similar requests have been received for over seven years.

The revised quota would apply across all housing schemes run by the Housing Department in both urban and rural areas ***PHOTO: PTI***

Opposition Leader R Ashoka condemned the housing quota increase, calling it "blatantly unconstitutional" and accusing the Congress government of appeasement politics that "rips apart Karnataka's social fabric." He added the move violates the Constitution and snatches away the rights of the people. BJP leader Amit Malviya echoed the charge.

Cong panel submits report on coastal communal tensions

A Congress-appointed fact-finding committee has recommended a holistic and multi-pronged approach, including socio-cultural interventions to address the vitiated communal atmosphere prevailing in coastal Karnataka. The committee headed by Rajya Sabha MP Syed Naseer Hussain on Thursday submitted its report to Shivakumar. "Admissions to educational institutions have dropped, and economic activities have declined. The Chamber of Commerce has flagged concerns. Business establishments close by 7 pm. Hate speeches and provocations have created an atmosphere of fear," he said. *—PTI*

RAGA TURNS 55

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, along with other Congress leaders, marked Rahul Gandhi's 55th birthday by creating his portrait using books at the Central College Grounds in Bengaluru on Thursday
PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Yathindra denies his ministerial ambitions

MYSURU, 18 JUNE

MLC Yathindra Siddaramaiah on Thursday said he is vying for a ministerial post in the State Congress government.

Speaking to reporters, Yathindra said that his father Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has been targeted by opposition parties from the time of assuming the charge of the State's chief minister for a second term. Attempts were made to "fix" his father and tarnish his image by using allegations of Maharshi Valmiki Development Corporation scandal, MUDA scam and several other cases. Opposition leaders are also targeting him, said Yathindra, adding that such strategies are common in politics. "The CM will complete his five-year term. I will not demand any post while he is in power in the State," he said. *—PTI*

UNDER NEW BILL

Organisers to get 3 years jail for stampedes

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

Key Bills including the one on crowd control and management in the wake of the 4 June stampede in Bengaluru that killed 11 people is likely to be discussed in the next Cabinet meeting, State Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil said on Thursday.

HK Patil
PHOTO: PTI

Notably, the bill doesn't just hold event organisers responsible for failing to manage crowds, but it also proposes a fine of Rs 50,000 and up to three years of imprisonment.

Also, likely to be discussed are Bills against misinformation or fake news, and hate speeches and crimes.

"Four bills were proposed today -- Karnataka crowd control, managing crowd at events and venue of mass gathering Bill, 2025; Karnataka Rohith Vemula Bill, 2025; Karnataka misinformation, fake news prohibition Bill, 2025; Karnataka hate speech and hate crimes prevention Bill, 2025," Patil told reporters after the cabinet meeting.

The draft Rohith Vemula Bill, reportedly proposes for compensation of up to Rs 1 lakh for students who face caste-based discrimination in higher education institutions, and jail term of one year and pay a fine of Rs 10,000 for guilty.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had written to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah in April urging the Karnataka government to enact "Rohith Vemula Act" to ensure that no one faces caste-based discrimination in the education system. Rohith Vemula, a Dalit student, allegedly died by suicide due to caste-based discrimination in Hyderabad, in 2016. *—PTI*

To stop growth: Priyank on Centre denying visa to US

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

Minister for IT and Biotechnology, Priyank Kharge, has criticised the Central government for denying him permission to travel to the United States to attract investments for the state.

Priyank Kharge
PHOTO: PTI

Kharge was scheduled to lead a delegation to Boston for Bio 2025 and to San Francisco for the Design Automation Conference. However, following the denial of clearance, he was forced to cut short his visit and return from Paris to Bengaluru on Wednesday night.

"It seems the Centre is trying to curtail Karnataka's growing reputation," Kharge told reporters. While acknowledging the Union government's authority to grant or withhold permission, he emphasised the need for transparency and justification.

Calling the rejection of his official tour "improper", Kharge said he would write to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) seeking an explanation and urged the Chief Minister to raise the issue with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He clarified that the trip was purely business-focused. "We are not going to talk politics in the US. We are going to bring in investment, which benefits both Karnataka and the Centre," he said. *—PTI*

Worms in food, cooking with toilet water: Nightmare at Kalaburagi hostel

YOHAN P HONNADI
KALABURAGI, 19 JUNE

Life for underprivileged SC/ST students has turned into a nightmare as the food served in a State government-run hostel in Kalaburagi regularly contains worms, cockroaches, gutkha packets, and even cigarette papers.

The Babu Jagjivan Ram Boys' Hostel Complex for SC/ST students, run by the Social Welfare Department, is in a State of appalling neglect.

Located on Rajapur Road, the hostel comprises six units. While the entrance may look modern, the interiors tell a grim tale: drain water from overhead pipes floods the floors, broken windows allow entry to flies and mosquitoes, and a foul stench hangs in the air.

Students allege the water used for cooking comes from toilet pipelines
PHOTO: SALAR

Students allege the water used for cooking comes from toilet pipelines, and pest-infested vegetables are regularly used. They further claim that kitchen staff often work under the influence of alcohol, gutkha, and tobacco. Complaints have fallen on deaf ears, with warden Sanjukumar allegedly taking no action.

"There is no clean drinking water. When we demand cleanliness, staff deny responsibility," said SFI District Secretary Sujata V. "Taluk-level officers haven't visited in three years, giving wardens unchecked power."

Students, fearful of backlash, spoke anonymously: "We live in unhygienic, unsafe conditions. Flies, mosquitoes, gutkha spit, sewage water and garbage plague the campus."

Another student who is in final year of their degree told to **Salar News** that the hostel lacks safety. "Outsider frequently enter the hostel premises. There is no proper safety system in place," the student said. Despite multiple complaints by students including Darshan, Rayappa, Syed, Karan, and Amith, no remedial action has been taken. However, when questioned by **Salar News,** Joint Director of the Social Welfare Department, Preeti Chandrashekar Doddmani, promised to inspect the facility and take necessary action. *—Salar News*

A baby cockroach is seen in the curry served with roti
PHOTO: SALAR

Not the right time for 'Thug Life' release: Distributor

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

The Karnataka distributor of actor Kamal Haasan's film 'Thug life' on Wednesday said he won't release the flick in the state now, despite a favourable court order as he believes it won't do good business two weeks after its release across India.

Distributor Venkatesh Kamalakar's comments came a day after the Supreme Court allowed the release of the Mani Ratnam directed film.

On a petition filed by a City resident seeking the release of the film in Karnataka, the Supreme Court had on 17 June held that it is the duty of the State to ensure that a film is released in theatres once it gets a Central Board of Film Certification certificate.

Speaking to PTI, Kamalakar, the distributor of the film in Karnataka said it also does not make sense to release the film considering that Kannadigas' sentiments were hurt by what Haasan had said about Kannada language.

"But mostly it is because it is not a good business decision to release the film now. His previous film 'Indian 2' also did not do well here in Karnataka," said Kamalakar.

The distributor said Haasan's 'Vikram' did well in State, but he does not have a fan base here that will blindly go to his film.

"'Thug Life' is generally considered as not a good film by many. So, it is too risky," said Kamalakar, who distributes mostly big budget Tamil films in Karnataka. *—PTI*

The Real Van Gogh Immersive Experience, a 30-minute visual and sensory journey, will open at Bharatiya Mall, Bengaluru on 29 June ***PHOTO: PTI***

TENSE WAIT

Not trained for war: Family of City girl in Iran

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

The first evacuees from Iran who arrived in New Delhi on Thursday morning came as a ray of hope for the family members others waiting for their loved ones to arrive.

The ones left behind are anxious and are panicking, so the Indian government must hurry with the evacuation, said a couple from Richmond Town in Bengaluru whose daughter is studying medicine at Tehran University of Medical Sciences.

In an exclusive interview with PTI Videos, Imran Mehdi, father of Fareehy Mehdi, said there was a blast very near to where his daughter was staying a couple of days ago.

"My daughter does not know how to survive in war-like situations. She is panicking so much already. So, I am requesting our Prime Minister and our External Affairs Minister to get all the Indian citizens stuck there as early as possible," said Shabana Mehdi, Fareehy's mother.

Imran Mehdi, father of Fareehy Mehdi, said there was a blast very near to where his daughter was staying a couple of days ago ***PHOTO: PTI***

Imran said when he spoke to his daughter on 13 June, he realised the gravity of the situation and tried to get her back immediately.

"But I could find tickets only for 15 June in Air Arabia. By then, the airspace was already closed for commercial flights. So, she is stuck there," he added.

The couple also expressed their gratitude to the Indian government for moving their daughter to a "safer" place.

"We were told that a batch of students were moved to Armenia, which is about six to seven hours from where my daughter is staying. She is still in Iran though," said the mother. *—PTI*

City can soon 'immerse' in Van Gogh

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

The next best thing to standing before Vincent van Gogh's Wheatfield with Crows — lost in the haunting loneliness he evoked with just a few brushstrokes — is being immersed in it. The Real Van Gogh Immersive Experience, a 30-minute visual and sensory journey, will open at Bharatiya Mall, Bengaluru, on 29 June.

Co-curator and producer Nikhil Chinappa stresses that nothing compares to seeing Van Gogh's original work. However, immersive shows like this, he says, can draw people closer to the artist's inner world. "Van Gogh is popular, yes. But knowing him means understanding what drove him — and why he painted the way he did."

Curator Hemali Vadalia, a New York-based artist and animator who worked on Loving Vincent, says this show stands apart from previous Van Gogh installations in India.

Built on a 200-page research document detailing Van Gogh's style, the team digitally animated his works with great precision. Bengaluru animator Naveen Kiran Boktapa brought these pieces to life — from curling waves to bobbing ships.

Projected using a powerful 22,000-lumen system — a first in India — the show also explores the science behind Van Gogh's yellow period, possibly linked to Digitalis toxicity. The result is a deeply moving and illuminating experience. *— PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Rahul Gandhi gets new address on 57th birthday

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

As birthday wishes poured in, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's began shifting to Bungalow No. 5, Sunehri Bagh Road. He will start living there before the next Parliament session, party sources said. After Gandhi became an MP, his residence had been 12, Tughlaq Lane. However, he had vacated that house after he was disqualified from Lok Sabha in 2023, following his conviction in a defamation case. Gandhi then moved into the 10, Janpath residence of his mother Sonia Gandhi and has been living there even after his disqualification was revoked. In addition to party colleagues, Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended wishes to the Leader of Opposition. *—PTI*

Sonia Gandhi discharged from hospital

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

Congress Parliamentary Party Chairperson Sonia Gandhi was discharged from Sir Ganga Ram Hospital in the national capital on Thursday, four days after being admitted for a stomach-related issue, the hospital said. The 78-year-old leader had been under medical care since June 15 for an abdominal infection. Hospital Chairman Dr Ajay Swaroop said Gandhi's condition is now stable. "She has been discharged and will continue to receive treatment," he said. Senior doctors involved in her care, including Dr S Nundy and Dr Amitabh Yadav, said she responded well. "She was admitted for an abdominal infection, which has been managed with medications. Her condition has improved, and she will be closely monitored as an outpatient," the doctors stated in a release. *—PTI*

Goa Oppn calls govt corrupt after Minister's sacking

PANAJI, 19 JUNE

Goa's Opposition parties have accused the Pramod Sawant-led government of corruption following the dismissal of Art and Culture Minister Govind Gaude from the State cabinet. Gaude was removed nearly a month after he alleged irregularities in the Tribal Welfare Department, overseen by Chief Minister Sawant. The government notification announcing his removal gave no official reason. Goa Congress Chief Amit Patkar claimed several ministers were involved in graft. Goa Forward Party leader Vijai Sardesai noted Gaude was never removed when corruption allegations were made against him previously, suggesting retaliation for his recent claims. *—PTI*

Marathi literary body opposes Hindi mandate

PUNE, 19 JUNE

The Akhil Bharatiya Marathi Sahitya Mahamandal, an apex Marathi literary body, has opposed the Maharashtra government's decision to adopt a three-language formula for Classes 1 to 5, claiming the New Education Policy does not recommend it. The Mahamandal's statement came on Wednesday amid opposition from the Congress and Raj Thackeray-led Maharashtra Navnirman Sena to an amended government order issued on Tuesday which said Hindi would "generally" be a third language for these classes. "It is clearly mentioned (in NEP) that a third language should be introduced from Class 6," a release from the Mahamandal said. It also questioned the need to teach a third language when many schools do not have enough teachers, and students of higher classes struggle to read Marathi books of Class 2 level. *—PTI*

Trump says he's keen on trade with Pak

Pak Army Chief Asim Munir says he and the US Prez discussed counter terror measures

ISLAMABAD, 19 JUNE

US President Donald Trump has expressed "keen interest" in developing a mutually beneficial trade partnership with Islamabad based on long-term strategic convergence and shared interests, the Pakistan Army said on Thursday.

In a statement after a meeting between Trump and Pakistan Army Chief Asim Munir at the White House Wednesday, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) – the media wing of the Pakistan Army – said they also discussed joint counterterrorism efforts.

The discussions also encompassed avenues for expanding bilateral cooperation in multiple domains, including trade, economic development, mines and minerals, artificial intelligence, energy, cryptocurrency, and emerging technologies, the ISPR said.

President Trump and Pakistan Army Chief Asim Munir PHOTO: X

"Trump expressed keen interest in forging a mutually beneficial trade partnership with Pakistan based on long-term strategic convergence and shared interests," said the statement.

Munir also "conveyed the deep appreciation of the government and people of Pakistan for Trump's constructive and result-oriented role in facilitating a ceasefire between Pakistan and India," it said.

He acknowledged Trump's statesmanship and his ability to comprehend and address the multifaceted challenges, the statement added.

Trump, in turn, lauded Pakistan's ongoing efforts for regional peace and stability, and appreciated the robust counter-terrorism cooperation between the two states, the ISPR said.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio and US Special Representative for the Middle East Steve Witkoff accompanied Trump. Munir was joined by National Security Advisor Lt Gen Asim Malik, who is also the head of the intelligence agency ISI. No senior civilian official from Pakistan was present.

A detailed exchange of views also took place on the prevailing tensions between Iran and Israel, with both leaders emphasising the importance of resolution of the conflict, the Pakistani media wing said.

In a "gesture reflecting the warmth of bilateral ties", Munir invited Trump, on behalf of the Pakistani government, to undertake an official visit to Pakistan at a mutually convenient date, the statement said.

Although initially scheduled for one hour, the meeting was extended for over two hours, underscoring the depth and cordiality of the dialogue, it claimed.

Separately, Trump said it was an honour for him to meet Munir in the White House, the first-ever such honour for any Pakistani Army Chief. *—PTI*

> **I was honoured to meet (Field Marshal Munir). I invited him to thank him for not going to war. He deserves appreciation for helping secure the ceasefire**
>
> —Donald Trump, US President

> **It is a huge blow to Indian diplomacy. (Munir) is the same man whose atrocious and inflammatory remarks formed the immediate backdrop to the brutal Pahalgam terror attacks.**
>
> —Jairam Ramesh, Congress leader

Khalistanis using Canada as launch pad, says report

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

Politically motivated violent extremism threat in Canada since mid-1980s has manifested through Khalistani extremists seeking to use violent means to create an independent nation state called Khalistan within India's Punjab, a report by Ottawa's intelligence agency has said.

It said a small group of Khalistani extremists are continuing to use Canada as a base for fundraising and planning of violence primarily in India.

The Canadian Security Intelligence Service's report for 2024 was released on Wednesday, a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Canadian counterpart Mark Carney with a focus on rebuilding bilateral ties that plummeted to an all-time low following a diplomatic spat over the killing of a Khalistani separatist.

The report said that the ongoing involvement in violent activities by Canada-based Khalistani extremists continues to pose a national security threat to Canada and Canadian interests.

The report said that the ongoing activities by Khalistani extremists continue to pose a national security threat to Canada PHOTO: ANI

The report was also critical of New Delhi for what it called India's foreign interference activities in Canada.

"In particular, real and perceived Khalistani extremism emerging from Canada continues to drive Indian foreign interference activities in Canada," it alleged.

The report appeared to clearly vindicate New Delhi's consistent position that pro-Khalistani elements in Canada have been carrying out anti-India activities with impunity. *—PTI*

I differ with some colleagues: Tharoor

T'PURAM, 19 JUNE

Congress Working Committee (CWC) member Shashi Tharoor on Thursday said that he has differences of opinion with some in the party leadership, but will not speak out in view of the bypoll in Nilambur constituency.

Tharoor said that Congress, its values, and its workers were very dear to him.

He said that he has worked closely with the party workers for 16 years and sees them as close friends and brothers.

"However, I do have differences of opinion with some in the Congress leadership...," Tharoor said.

He did not clarify whether his differences of opinion were with the national or state leadership.

Tharoor was not invited for the bypoll campaign as was the practice during the other byelections.

Hewanted UDF candidate to win from Nilambur.

Regarding his recent talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Tharoor said it was regarding the delegations' visits to various countries in connection with Operation Sindoor and the discussions held there. *—PTI*

AIR INDIA PLANE CRASH

A week on, tail fin still lies at site

AHMEDABAD, 19 JUNE

A week after the devastating Air India plane crash in Ahmedabad that claimed 270 lives, the debris, including the ill-fated aircraft's tail fin, is still lying at the site as investigators looked for clues to establish the exact cause behind the accident, said officials on Thursday.

The Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB), a division of the Ministry of Civil Aviation, is leading the investigation.

The Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau, a division of the Ministry of Civil Aviation, is leading the investigation PHOTO:PTI

While the Gujarat government on Thursday clarified that it has no role in the investigation, local firemen are helping forensic and aviation experts in their ongoing probe at the crash site, said Ahmedabad's Additional Chief Fire Officer Jayesh Khadia.

After the aircraft smashed into the medical hostel complex, its tail fin got stuck on top of the hostel canteen's damaged building and it was brought to the ground using cranes on 14 June, two days after the accident, said Khadia.

"The debris, including the tail fin, is still lying at the site. There are no orders on moving the rubble to some other place," he informed.

Inspector DB Basiya of the Meghaninagar police station, under whose jurisdiction the crash occurred, maintained that AAIB will decide the fate of the plane wreckage.

"Role of the police is limited to protecting the site. The plane's wreckage is still lying there. AAIB will decide what to do with it. It is possible that in the future, AAIB may take the debris to another spot for investigation," said Basia.

Meanwhile 211 victims have been identified so far through DNA matching, while 189 bodies handed over to their families, an official said on Thursday. *—PTI*

Family members mourn the death of First Officer Clive Kunder, co-pilot of the ill-fated Air India plane PHOTO:X/@radhika1705

AI CO-PILOT CLIVE KUNDER'S BODY BROUGHT HOME

The mortal remains of First Officer Clive Kunder, co-pilot of the Air India plane, were brought to his home in Mumbai on Thursday morning, officials said. The casket carrying the co-pilot's remains reached Mumbai airport by a flight and his family members then brought it to his residence, located on Ram Mandir Road in Goregaon (West), an official said. Kunder lived with his elderly parents and a younger sister in Mumbai. The last rites of pilot Sabharwal, who was a resident of Powai area in Mumbai, were performed on Tuesday.

8-MONTH-OLD SUFFERED 28% BURNS, STATUS IMPROVING

When the Air India 171 plane plunged into the BJ Medical College's residential complex, Manisha Kachhadiya and her 8-month-old son Dhyaansh were in one of the buildings affected by the crash. Both of them sustained burn injuries. Dhyaansh, the youngest among those injured in the crash, suffered 28 per cent burns and had to be admitted to the Paediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) of the Civil Hospital in Ahmedabad. The infant is still in the PICU where his condition his improving, Dhyaansh's father Kapil Kachhadiya said.

INDIGO, SPICEJET PLANES RETURN AFTER TAKEOFF

A Leh-bound IndiGo plane returned to the national capital due to a technical issue on Thursday morning after being airborne for over two hours. The A320 aircraft, operating the flight 6E2006 from Delhi to Leh, returned to the national capital after being airborne for over two hours. Similarly, a Hyderabad-Tirupati SpiceJet flight returned to the city shortly after take-off due to a snag, sources said. Flight SG 2696

returned to Rajiv Gandhi International Airport shortly after take-off. SpiceJet said the aircraft experienced an intermittent illumination of the AFT baggage door light after take-off and cabin pressurisation remained normal throughout.

KERALA TOPS IN TURNOUT

5 Assembly bypolls in 4 states largely peaceful

LUDHIANA/ AHMEDABAD, 19 JUNE

Bypolls were held in five Assembly segments across Punjab, West Bengal, Gujarat and Kerala on Thursday, with the Kaliganj seat in West Bengal registering a polling percentage of nearly 70 by 5pm.

Polling commenced at 7am and concluded at 6pm and was largely peaceful, with the exception of a few isolated incidents, officials said.

While the deaths of the incumbent MLAs necessitated the bypolls in one seat each in Gujarat, West Bengal and Punjab, the resignation of two legislators led to the polling in Kerala and another seat in Gujarat.

At Kaliganj in West Bengal's Nadia district, a voter turnout of 69.85 per cent was recorded till 5pm.

The bypoll was necessitated by the death of Trinamool Congress (TMC) MLA Nasiruddin Ahamed in February. His daughter, Alifa Ahamed, was fielded in the bypoll by the ruling TMC.

People wait in a queue at the booth at GMLP School in Malappuram, Kerala, on Thursday PHOTO: PTI

The BJP nominated Ashis Ghosh for the contest, while Congress candidate Kabil Uddin Shaikh is in the fray with the support of the CPI(M).

At Chandghar, the Congress alleged that its polling agent was forcibly removed by TMC workers, an allegation denied by the ruling party.

Kerala's Nilambur constituency saw a voter turnout of 70.76 per cent at 5pm.

Among the 10 contestants, the key contenders are ruling LDF's pick M Swaraj, Aryadan Shoukath (of the Congress-led UDF), TMC state convenor and independent candidate PV Anvar – whose resignation necessitated the bypoll – and Mohan George of the BJP-led NDA.

In Gujarat, the Visavadar seat in Junagadh district recorded a poll percentage of 54.61 and Kadi in Mehsana district saw a voter turnout of 54.49 per cent till 5pm.

The state government declared a public holiday on Thursday in both the constituencies.

The Visavadar seat was lying vacant since December 2023, after the then AAP legislator Bhupendra Bhayani resigned and joined the ruling BJP.

The Kadi seat, reserved for Scheduled Caste (SC) candidates, fell vacant on 4 February following the death of BJP MLA Karsan Solanki.

Punjab saw a voter turnout of 49.07 per cent till 3pm in the Ludhiana West seat.

The bypoll results will be declared on 23 June. *—PTI*

Security men gun down Kuki woman in Manipur

HEICHANGLOK, 19 JUNE

Security forces allegedly shot dead a Kuki woman in the Heichanglok area late this afternoon. The deceased is reportedly the wife of the Chief of Langchingmanb in Churachandpur district. Her body was taken to Churachandpur district headquarters by the police tonight.

In a related incident, an elderly Meitei farmer, N Dhiren, was shot in the arm today in Bishnupur district. The attack occurred at around 3 pm in a paddy field in Phubala village. Mr Dhiren reported that at least five shots were fired. He is currently receiving treatment at a local hospital.

Meanwhile, Manipur Legislative Assembly Speaker Thokchom Satyabrata Singh emphasised the inevitability of a change in the state's administration, currently under President's Rule. Speaking on Thursday, Singh highlighted the urgent need to restore a popular government after prolonged ethnic violence since May 2023.

Wife of Langchingmanb PHOTO: X

"I've heard groups are forming for government formation, possibly involving someone from Delhi, but I am not involved as I remain in the Assembly," said Singh, representing Yaiskul. He insisted legislators must act according to the people's will and stressed that President's Rule is temporary.

President's Rule was imposed in Manipur on 13 February following the resignation of Chief Minister N Biren Singh and ratified by Parliament in April, suspending the Assembly. *—Salar News*

Heard bombs: Indian students recall war

Indian Embassy coordinated students' move from Tehran to Armenia under Op Sindhu

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

"We saw missiles in the sky and heard bombs in our neighbourhood... We were petrified", said MBBS student Mir Khalif, his voice still trembling with fear, as he stepped out of the Delhi airport after being evacuated from war-hit Iran under Operation Sindhu.

Khalif arrived in Delhi early Thursday in the first evacuation flight carrying 110 Indian students as part of the special operation launched by the Indian government in response to the escalating Iran-Israel conflict.

The Indian Embassy coordinated the move of the students, including 90 from Jammu and Kashmir, from Tehran to Armenia earlier this week.

Khalif described the experience in Iran as a nightmare and thanked the Indian government for bringing them back home.

Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh meets the Indian students returning from war-torn Iran via Armenia, at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi. MBBS student Sabah Rasool is welcomed by her mother after returning home in Srinagar **PHOTO: PTI**

"...I hope no student has to face what we did," he said.

Students still stuck in Iran were being relocated to safer places.

"Our neighbourhood was attacked. When the Indian government came to our doorstep, it felt like home," Varta, a student from Kashmir recalled. Ali Akbar, a student from Delhi, said the destruction was visible everywhere.

Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh received the students at the Delhi airport, later sharing some photos of them on X.

Confirming evacuation efforts being uderway, Singh thanked governments in Turkmenistan and Armenia for their support.

Meanwhile, several parents waited anxiously at the airport to reunite with their children.

Haider Ali, father of MBBS student Maaz Haider, said, "We are happy and grateful, but our hearts are still heavy knowing that many students are still stuck in Tehran."

The Jammu and Kashmir Students' Association also thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar for the evacuation. *– PTI*

- Haider Khalif described the experience in Iran as a nightmare and thanked the Indian government for bringing them back home."I hope no student has to face what we did," he said. "When the Indian government came to our doorstep, it felt like home," Varta, a student said.

Harassed by in-laws, Pune woman kills herself

PUNE, 19 JUNE

A 31-year-old woman and her six-year-old son has died by suicide in Maharashtra's Pune after being harassed by her sister-in-law. The victims reportedly jumped from the terrace of their multi-storey building in Pune's Ambegaon Budruk area on Wednesday 18 June. The victim, Mayuri Shashikant Deshmukh, reportedly left behind a note blaming her sister-in-law's harassment for driving her to take the extreme step, said a senior officer from the Ambegaon Police Station. Police have launched an investigation, and further inquiries are ongoing. The case may involve abetment of suicide if the allegations are substantiated during the probe. Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.—*PTI*

Woman dies by suicide after mob trial in Kerala

KANNUR, 19 JUNE

A woman in her 40s died by suicide in Pinarayi village in Kerala, after allegedly being publicly humiliated by a group of men. The victim, Rasina, was reportedly distressed after her male friend was subjected to a "mob trial" on Sunday evening. Three men affiliated to the Social Democratic Party of India, linked to the banned Islamist outfit Popular Front of India (PFI), were arrested. Police said the group confronted Rasina near a mosque, assaulted her friend, confiscated his devices, and detained him for several hours at an SDPI office. A suicide note was recovered. The accused are in judicial custody, and further arrests may follow as the investigation continues. Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.—*PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Sand mafia attacks govt officials in UP's Jhansi

JHANSI, 19 JUNE

Illegal sand miners allegedly attacked a team of government officials in Mau Ranipur, Uttar Pradesh, and forcibly reclaimed two seized tractors laden with illegally extracted sand, officials said on Thursday. Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) Ajay Yadav reported that he and colleagues Mahendra Singh and Kamlesh were assaulted near Jait Mata Mandir in Kachnev village during Wednesday's anti-mining operation. A complaint was lodged by SDM security staff member Kamta Prasad at Katera police station. Accused individuals, including Sohit Yadav and Ankit Yadav, fled with the vehicles. Police have registered a case under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, including assault and obstruction of duty. An investigation is ongoing, and efforts are underway to locate and apprehend the suspects.—*PTI*

3rd gangrape in Odisha in 3 days

BARIPADA, 19 JUNE

A 31-year-old woman in Odisha's Mayurbhanj district has been allegedly gangraped by four men, police confirmed on Thursday. This marks the third such incident reported in the state within three days. According to a complaint lodged by the victim's husband, the men—known to the family—entered their home in the Baripada Sadar police station area on the night of 16 June, when no other family member was present. They forcibly took her to another location and raped her. They allegedly threatened to kill her if she spoke out. All four suspects are currently absconding. A search team has been formed. The woman is undergoing treatment in a hospital. —*PTI*

SUSPENDED IN ABDUCTION CASE

SC transfers probe against TN ADGP to CB-CID

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

The Supreme Court on Thursday transferred investigation against additional deputy general of police (ADGP) HM Jayaram to the CB-CID after the Tamil Nadu government said it wanted his suspension to continue till probe in the kidnapping case allegedly involving him is over.

A bench of Justices Ujjal Bhuyan and Manmohan requested the Madras High Court chief justice to transfer cases involving Jayaram to another bench.

It also set aside the high court's directive asking police to take Jayaram in custody.

The top court asked the Tamil Nadu government to apprise it on whether it can transfer investigation against him to a special branch or CID.

Tamil Nadu government counsel, Siddharth Dave said that the ADGP's suspension was not pursuant to the high court order in kidnapping case and there were other allegations against him.

The bench asked Dave to seek instruction on transferring the investigation to a special bench or the CID during the course of the day and inform the court.

The top court on 18 June grilled the Tamil Nadu government over the suspension of Jayaram.

The apex court was informed that the officer was taken into custody and released on 17 June, but was placed under suspension.

On June 16, the high court directed the Tamil Nadu police to take Jayaram in custody in connection with a kidnapping case involving a girl and a boy on 5 April. *– PTI*

Can't seal locked premises: ED to HC

CHENNAI, 19 JUNE

The Enforcement Directorate has submitted before the Madras High Court that it has no power to seal a property if it was locked at the time of making a search under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

Additional Solicitor General (ASG) SV Raju made the submission when the petitions filed by film producer Akash Bhaskaran and businessman Vikram Ravindran came up for hearing before a division bench comprising Justices MS Ramesh and V Lakshminarayanan on Wednesday.

In their petitions, Akash and Vikram challenged the action of ED in conducting the search at their residence and office and sealing the same.

When the case came up, the bench questioned the power of ED to seal the premises.

Raju submitted that the Central probe agency has no power to seal the premises. However, it has powers under section 17 of the PMLA to break open the lock. But, the ED did not want to escalate the situation, he added.

The ASG also informed the bench that the ED was instructed to withdraw the notice pasted on the premises of the petitioners and to return all seized material.

Following this, the bench reserved orders on the interim applications. —*PTI*

ED CONDUCTS RAIDS IN BIHAR COPS RECRUITMENT 'SCAM'

PATNA, 19 JUNE

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday conducted multi-state searches in connection with a money laundering investigation into an alleged scam in the recruitment of police constables in Bihar during 2023, official sources said.

A dozen locations of agents, exam paper leak syndicate members and their associates in Patna, Nalanda, Ranchi, Lucknow and Kolkata were raided under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). A press in Kolkata in which the exam papers were printed was also raided by agency.

The masterminds of this alleged scam and those behind the NEET UG paper leak 'scam' of 2024 are the same.

The Bihar police constable recruitment in 2023 was aimed to fill 21,391 vacancies across various units of the Bihar police. The examination was conducted at 529 centres across 37 districts of Bihar on 1 October, 2023 attracting over 18 lakh aspirants. —*PTI*

Kerala min walks out over Bharat Mata row

T'PURAM, 19 JUNE

V Sivankutty **PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA**

The Bharat Mata controversy resurfaced in Kerala after State General Education Minister V Sivankutty walked out of a state government event at Raj Bhavan on Thursday, protesting against the display of an image widely used in RSS functions, during the programme.

Following his walkout, the Raj Bhavan issued a statement in which Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar said, "There is no question of doing away with Bharathambha (Bharat Mata)".

State Agriculture Minister P Prasad had boycotted the Environment Day event at the Raj Bhavan over the display of the portrait.

The move had led to a row between the CPI and Governor Arlekar, who had asserted that there would be no compromise on Bharat Mata.

"We cannot allow Raj Bhawan to be turned into a RSS centre. The Governor took a political standm which is much worse,"z

The latest incident of Sivankutty walking out of the event over the portrait comes a day after Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan criticised the display of the Bharat Mata portrait at the Raj Bhavan. —*PTI*

BR Gavai **PHOTO: ANI**

Democracy and inequality don't go along: Gavai

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

Without addressing the structural inequalities that marginalise large sections of society, no nation can claim to be truly progressive or democratic, Chief Justice of India B R Gavai has said.

Speaking at a function in Milan on Wednesday on 'Role of Constitution in Delivering Socio-Economic Justice in a Country: Reflections from 75 Years of Indian Constitution', the CJI said justice is not an abstract ideal and it must take root in social structures, the distribution of opportunity and the conditions under which people live.

The CJI said it is not merely a matter of redistribution or welfare, but it is also about enabling every person to participate as equals in the social, economic, and political life of the country. —*PTI*

Rain-related incidents claim 4 lives in Jharkhand

A house caved in due to heavy rainfall in Saraikela-Kharsawan district in Jharkhand **PHOTO: PTI**

RANCHI, 19 JUNE

Heavy rainfall across Jharkhand left four people, including two schoolboys and a 10-year-old girl, dead in three places, besides causing damage in several districts.

Several rivers were in spate.

The bodies of the two minor boys were recovered from under the debris of a collapsed under-construction well at Khunti district's Murhu panchayat.

The children were playing near the well that gave way due to heavy rain on 18 June.

A 10-year-old girl died when her mud house collapsed in Murpa village in Ranchi district.

A woman was killed and her three children suffered injuries after their kucha house collapsed on Thursday in Kulitotang village in West Singhbhum district.

The body has been recovered and sent for post-mortem examination, while the injured children were taken to a hospital in Chakradharpur.

Schools in affected areas, including Ranchi and Khunti, were closed on Thursday.

—*PTI*

RANKS 123

QS World University Rankings: IIT Delhi is best Indian institute

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi is the best-ranked Indian institution in QS World University Rankings for 2026 by climbing up to the 123rd spot with a record 54 universities and institutions from the country making it to the coveted list.

IIT Delhi ranked 197 and 150 in the previous two years. It achieved outstanding results in employer reputation, citations, sustainability and academic reputation.

Georgia Institute of Technology, US also bagged the 123rd spot.

IIT Bombay remained in the global top 130 highly on employer reputation.

The coveted QS World University Rankings, published annually by Londoon-based global higher education analytics firm Quacquarelli Symonds, assess universities based on a variety of performance indicators.

India with 54 institutions is the fourth most represented country behind the US, UK and Mainland China. Jordan and Azerbaijan are second most improved in 2026.

Jessica Turner, CEO of QS said, "Indian universities are strengthening their global research footprint and advancing in several areas.

India's ranked universities have grown from 11 to 54 in a decade, a 390 per cent increase and the strongest performance across G20. —*PTI*

Assam UNESCO sites's staff not paid for 6 months

SIVASAGAR, 19 JUNE

The contractual employees, engaged by the Directorate of Archaeology to look after 167 monuments across Assam, including the UNESCO World Heritage site of Ahom era 'Moidams', on Thursday claimed that they have not received their salaries for at least six months.

The authorities concerned admitted that there are certain issues regarding the payment of salaries.

Around 180 employees of two private contractors were not paid their dues as the Assam government has "not cleared the bills" worth over Rs 2 crore of the vendors for years. This severely affected the maintenance of these historical sites, with many of them not reporting for their duties. —*PTI*

BJP govt's hatred for Tamil pride visible: Stalin

CHENNAI, 19 JUNE

The BJP government's attempt to dismiss the findings of the ancient excavation site of Keezhadi in Tamil Nadu's Sivaganga district by delaying publication of the final report showed its hatred for Tamil pride, Chief Minister M K Stalin alleged on Thursday.

The Central government failed to produce additional evidence even two years after the final report was submitted, he claimed.

The BJP instead promoting the fictional Saraswati civilisation.

The artefacts obtained from Keezhadi site were subjected to world-class scientific research.

Amarnath Ramakrishna, the director who carried out the Keezhadi excavations, was transferred to Assam. He had submitted the initial report to the Archaeological Survey of India in 2016.

The Keezhadi excavations prove the Vaigai River civilisation is approximately 2,500 to 3,000 years old, Stalin asserted. He flayed the AIADMK for its silence on the issue.

Protests by DMK youth wing and the ruling party's allies in Chennai and Madurai condemning the Centre's stand would continue.

—*PTI*

MODI'S GIFTS TO G7

Prime Minister Narendra Modi gifted beautiful heritage pieces to the world leaders during his G7 visit. Clockwise from top left: He gifted a handcrafted Dokra Nandi sculpture, a Hindu deity, from Tamil Nadu to French President Emmanuel Macron; German Chancellor Friedrich Merz received a sandstone replica of Odisha's Konark Wheel; Alberta Lieutenant Governor Salma Lakhani got a Papier-match box with gold leaf work from Jammu and Kashmir; Mary Simon, Governor General of Canada, was gifted Silver Filigree Work Clutch Purse
PHOTO: ANI

Why Israel-Iran war might not raise oil prices now

Iran exports up to 2 million barrels of oil and refined petroleum products per day ***PHOTO: FREEPIK***

The unexpected attack by Israel on Iran, a major oil-producing nation, may undermine anaemic global economic growth and hinder central banks' ability to cope in an already uncertain market.

Iran exports up to 2 million barrels of oil and refined petroleum products per day (million barrels per day – mbd). Due to long-standing sanctions, most of this oil is sold to China at discounted prices.

Normally, a sudden loss of the Iranian exports (equivalent to around 2 per cent of global oil supply) would trigger panic. But Opec (the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) is in the process of reversing the production cuts imposed in the Covid pandemic.

This leaves the organisation with an unusually large spare capacity of at least four million barrels per day, most of which is held by Saudi Arabia (up to 3.5 million) and the UAE (about one million).

On top of that, the International Energy Agency (IEA) holds more than 1.2 billion barrels of emergency reserves across OECD countries, ready to be deployed if needed. China, too, has significant reserves, though the line between its commercial and strategic stocks is less clear.

Additionally, some 40 million barrels of Iranian oil are stranded aboard anchored ships near China, unsold due to declining industrial demand and electric vehicles hitting petrol consumption.

In May, China's refinery throughput fell 1.8 per cent year-on-year, with no signs of a swift rebound. What's more, the IEA is expecting global oil production to exceed 1.8mbd, compared to its earlier projection of only 0.72mbd, leaving a massive surplus of supply over demand.

China has proven to be an opportunistic buyer. It did not buy the excess Iranian oil supplies at USD 65 (48 pounds) a barrel earlier this year, and whether it buys at USD 75 (at the time of writing) or higher, may be a signal of how seriously it views the Middle East tensions. Meanwhile, other Asian importers have been quick to secure prompt shipments from west Africa, and eye the US supplies.

Thanks to this surplus capacity and stagnant demand, the oil market's reaction has been more muted than many feared. Prices briefly spiked by USD 10 but have since eased. It appears that the market is assessing whether the hostilities will escalate. If so, the impact on energy prices and inflation could be significant.

It remains somewhat unclear why Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu chose this moment to strike Iran, especially in the middle of peace negotiations between Iran and the United States.

In a recent interview, former Israeli leader Ehud Barak admitted that even a full-scale attack would only delay Iran's nuclear ambitions by weeks or months at best, with US support.

Diplomacy, then, may remain the more effective route. This was the rationale behind the Iran nuclear deal brokered under US president Barack Obama, a deal later dismantled by Trump under pressure from Netanyahu.

So, Netanyahu's endgame might be political survival and diverting attention from the catastrophe in Gaza.

If Iran feels sufficiently cornered, it may retaliate by shutting down the Strait of Hormuz – a strategic chokepoint through which up to 20 million barrels of oil pass daily. A lot of that oil can be diverted through alternative supply routes such as a large (6 mbd) Saudi East-West pipeline leading to the Red Sea. There is also the UAE pipeline, which avoids the Strait of Hormuz and leads to the port of Fujairah, in the Gulf of Oman.

Nevertheless, the increased risk and higher shipping costs would certainly result in much higher prices at the pump. The cost of insurance for ships travelling through the Strait of Hormuz have jumped 60 per cent since the start of the conflict. That, combined with the broader economic fallout, could have global repercussions.

The World Bank recently downgraded its global growth forecast to 2.3 per cent for 2025 – nearly half a percentage point below previous estimates. While a worldwide recession is not yet predicted, the bank warned that growth this decade could be the slowest since the 1960s.

Among the leading culprits is Trump's tariff policy, which has strained global trade, reduced efficiency and effectively imposed a tax on consumers both in the US and elsewhere. The fear of inflation has led to rising long-term bond yields.

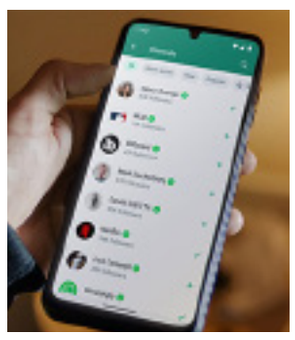
Expectations of higher inflation and high bond yields, in turn, constrain central banks from stimulating the economy by cutting interest rates. This is a key tool used by the US Federal Reserve to influence the cost of borrowing throughout the US economy and thus attempt to stimulate economic activity.

The conflict may not have sparked a global oil crisis yet, but it won't improve the cost of living.

—PTI

SALAR

Can a foreign government hack your WhatsApp?



Earlier, Iranian officials urged the country's citizens to remove the messaging platform WhatsApp from their smartphones. Without providing any supporting evidence, they alleged the app gathers user information to send to Israel.

WhatsApp has rejected the allegations. In a statement to Associated Press, the Meta-owned messaging platform said it was concerned "these false reports will be an excuse for our services to be blocked at a time when people need them most". It added that it does not track users' location nor the personal messages people are sending one another.

It is impossible to independently assess the allegations, given Iran provided no publicly accessible supporting evidence.

But we do know that even though WhatsApp has strong privacy and security features, it isn't impenetrable. And there is at least one country that has previously been able to penetrate it: Israel.

WhatsApp is a free messaging app owned by Meta. With around 3 billion users worldwide and growing fast, it can send text messages, calls and media over the internet.

It uses strong end-to-end encryption meaning only the sender and recipient can read messages; not even WhatsApp can access their content. This ensures strong privacy and security.

The United States is the world leader in cyber capability. This term describes the skills, technologies and resources that enable nations to defend, attack, or exploit digital systems and networks as a powerful instrument of national power.

But Israel also has advanced cyber capability, ranking alongside the United Kingdom, China, Russia, France and Canada.

Israel has a documented history of conducting sophisticated cyber operations. This includes the widely cited Stuxnet attack that targeted Iran's nuclear program more than 15 years ago. Israeli cyber units, such as Unit 8200, are renowned for their technical expertise and innovation in both offensive and defensive operations.

Seven of the top 10 global cybersecurity firms maintain R&D centers in Israel, and Israeli startups frequently lead in developing novel offensive and defensive cyber tools.

A historical precedent

Israeli firms have repeatedly been linked to hacking WhatsApp accounts, most notably through the Pegasus spyware developed by Israeli-based cyber intelligence company NSO Group. In 2019, it exploited WhatsApp vulnerabilities to compromise 1,400 users, including journalists, activists and politicians.

Last month, a US federal court ordered the NSO Group to pay WhatsApp and Meta nearly US$170 million in damages for the hack.

Another Israeli company, Paragon Solutions, also recently targeted nearly 100 WhatsApp accounts. The company used advanced spyware to access private communications after they had been de-encrypted.

These kinds of attacks often use "spearphishing". This is distinct from regular phishing attacks, which generally involve an attacker sending malicious links to thousands of people.

Instead, spearphishing involves sending targeted, deceptive messages or files to trick specific individuals into installing spyware. This grants attackers full access to their devices – including de-encrypted WhatsApp messages.

A spearphishing email might appear to come from a trusted colleague or organisation. It might ask the recipient to urgently review a document or reset a password, leading them to a fake login page or triggering a malware download.

Protecting yourself from 'spearphishing'

To avoid spearphishing, people should scrutinise unexpected emails or messages, especially those conveying a sense of urgency, and never click suspicious links or download unknown attachments.

Hovering the mouse cursor over a link will reveal the name of the destination. Suspicious links are those with strange domain names and garbled text that has nothing to do with the purported sender. Simply hovering without clicking is not dangerous.

Enable two-factor authentication, keep your software updated, and verify requests coming through trusted channels. Regular cybersecurity training also helps users spot and resist these targeted attacks.

—The Conversation

Spearphishing involves sending messages to trick individuals into installing spyware ***PHOTO: FREEPIK***

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

From Sonam to Muskan: What makes women killers different?

Sonam, Muskan, Shivani, Ravina, framed in their dual identities as women and alleged "husband killers", they have not just grabbed headlines and courted notoriety over the last months but also challenged conventional notions about femininity and crime.

That the were women from small towns who broke out of stereotype in the most brutal way possible led to sensational headlines, frantic curiosity and also gave fodder to a series of misogynistic memes and jokes.

The questions abound - why do women commit crimes, why are they treated differently than male criminals, are they demonstrating empowerment or signs that they are, in fact, disempowered.

It's a mix of social stigma, rigid gender roles, and unrealistic standards for women, experts said.

A woman committing a crime "not only violates a legal norm but also a gender norm", explained GS Bajpai, professor of criminology and vice chancellor of the National Law University in Delhi.

"Women are expected to be caring and compliant. A woman who commits crime is therefore an aberration - abnormal and exceptional. This is not true for men... She is, therefore, as some scholars have described, 'doubly deviant and hence must be doubly punished'. Thus her gender becomes relevant to society's response to the crime. She is not just a criminal, she is a female criminal," Bajpai said.

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reported over 4.45 lakh crimes against women in 2022. However, it doesn't maintain a separate category for crimes 'by' women. Yet serious offences committed by women, however small in number, make an impact all their own.

On Tuesday, Sonam Raghuvanshi was taken to Meghalaya to reconstruct the killing of her husband Raja Raghuvanshi found hacked to death on a hillside. The Indore couple was on their honeymoon and the bride allegedly plotted the killing along with her former boyfriend and three hitmen.

In March this year, Muskan Rastogi and her lover Sahil Shukla allegedly stabbed her husband Saurabh Rajput to death in Meerut, dismembered his body, and sealed the remains in a drum filled with cement.

In April, Bijnor's Shivani claimed her husband died of a heart attack. Police later revealed that she had strangled Deepak to death. The same month, in Bhiwani, YouTuber Ravina allegedly killed her husband with the help of a male friend after he objected to their "intimacy" and her social media activities. Except for Ravina who is 32, the others are in their 20s.

Murder accused Sonam Raghuvanshi and Muskan Rastogi. Experts suggest that a mix of social stigma, rigid gender roles, and unrealistic standards for women makes female criminals distinct from their male counterparts ***PHOTO: PTI***

The public focus "reflects our discomfort with women breaking out of the roles assigned to them. Societal suppression will eventually lead to outbursts. The media is sensationalising it, giving it a 'Sonam did it' spin, as if she acted alone, which she didn't-there was male involvement too," women's rights activist Yogita Bhayana noted.

She said it was easier for Sonam to plot a murder than to admit she was in love.

"That's the kind of psychological conflict women face in our society. Her crime isn't being defended, but we need to examine the root causes -- how our culture conditions women to behave a certain way."

Men, Bajpai added, are motivated primarily by power, honour, impulse, and instrumental goals while female crime is often propelled by prior victimisation, manipulation, and emotional stress.

Intimate partner violence is "neither new nor uncommon", as global and national trends have indicated that "instances of husbands killing their wives far outnumber instances of wives killing their husbands", he argued. "In fact, over half of all cases of homicide against women in India are carried out by their current or former partners".

According to criminal psychologist Deepti Puranik, there may be a number of reasons behind such an "outburst" against social ties.

"Culture and society generally play a lot of roles when it comes to marriages. People are forced to get married against their wishes. Many people are getting married very early and at that age they haven't reached an emotional maturity level to understand the responsibility that comes with a marital relationship," she said.

Women's mental health and internal struggles are ignored, she said. The suppression they face growing up, the communication barriers, and the unrealistic expectations placed on them all builds up.

Stories of women criminals have often followed a predictable pattern -- centred on themes like extramarital affairs. This reflects a broader lack of nuance in how cases are understood, revealing gaps in the way female criminality and its complex motivations are examined.

—PTI

Day 7: Iran–Israel bombing on as death toll mounts

Israeli forces destroy another nuke reactor in Iran; Tehran strikes at hospital in Israel

TEL AVIV/BEERSHEBA, 19 JUNE

Israel and Iran traded missiles and drones for the seventh consecutive day, as casualties mounted on either side.

Israel struck Iran's Arak heavy water reactor, in its latest attack on the country's sprawling nuclear programme, while an Iranian missile slammed into the main hospital in southern Israel early Thursday, causing "extensive damage" but no serious injuries, according to the medical facility.

However, Iran, through its state-run IRNA news agency, claimed it targeted an Israeli military site, not the hospital. Iran claimed the "blast wave" of the missile struck the hospital.

Other Iranian missiles hit a high-rise building and several other residential buildings in at least two sites near Tel Aviv. At least 240 people were wounded in the attacks, according to Israel's Magen David Adom rescue service.

Rescue workers and military personnel inspect the site of an Iranian missile strike in Ramat Gan on Thursday; a woman being evacuated from the site of another Iranian missile strike in the same town on Thursday *PHOTO: PTI*

Meanwhile, Israel's military said its fighter jets targeted the Arak facility and its reactor core seal to halt it from being used to produce plutonium.

"The strike targeted the component intended for plutonium production, in order to prevent the reactor from being restored and used for nuclear weapons development," the military said. Israel separately claimed to have struck another site around Natanz it described as being related to Iran's nuclear programme.

Iranian state TV said there was "no radiation danger whatsoever" from the attack on the Arak site.

The hospital hit by Iran said the main impact was on an old surgery building that had been evacuated in recent days. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu condemned the strike on the hospital and vowed a response, saying: "We will exact the full price from the tyrants in Tehran."

Iran fired hundreds of missiles and drones at Israel, though most have been shot down by Israel's air defences.

Israeli officials said the famed Iron Dome defence system was imperfect, as they said that Iran was using a missile with multiple warheads in its attack, making them harder to track.

Meanwhile, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said he would travel to Geneva for meetings with European counterparts on Friday. Iran's news said the meeting would include ministers from the UK, France and Germany and the European Union's top diplomat. —*PTI*

> **A dictator like Khamenei, who heads a country like Iran and has made the destruction of Israel his mission, cannot continue to exist. The IDF has been instructed and knows that in order to achieve all of its goals, this man absolutely should not continue to exist**
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>
> —Israel Katz, Israel Defence Minister

> **Benjamin Netanyahu is a wanted war criminal. He is also a con man who has duped successive US Presidents into fighting his own wars for almost three decades.... Netanyahu manufactured this war to destroy diplomacy**
>
>
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> —Seyed Abbas Araghchi, Iran Foreign Minister

Russia can broker Israel–Iran peace: Putin

ST. PETERSBURG, 19 JUNE

Russian President Vladimir Putin offered suggested that Moscow could help negotiate a settlement that could allow Tehran to pursue a peaceful atomic programme while assuaging Israeli security concerns.

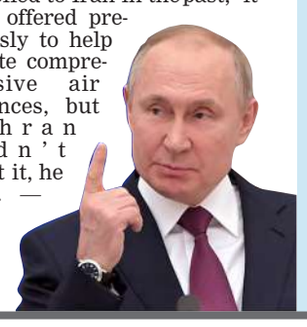
Putin shared Moscow's proposals with Iran, Israel and the United States.

"We are not imposing anything on anyone; we are simply talking about how we see a possible way out of the situation," he said.

Putin emphasised that Russia has a trusting relationship with Iran and helped built its first nuclear power plant in Bushehr. He said that over 200 Russian workers are involved in building two more reactors in Bushehr, adding that "we agreed with the Israeli leadership that their security will be ensured".

However, Putin said Tehran hadn't yet asked Moscow for military assistance.

In addition to a few air defence systems that Russia supplied to Iran in the past, it also offered previously to help create comprehensive air defences, but Tehran didn't want it, he said. —*PTI*



Iran executed 975 in 2024, says UN

Iran carried out executions at "an alarming rate" last year with at least 975 people killed, the United Nations Chief said in a report. The report cited other human rights abuses, from barriers to freedom of expression to the use of torture and arbitrary detention. The 975 people executed in 2024 was the highest rate of executions since 2015, said the report by Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. Four executions were carried out publicly. Iran executes by hanging. The report also said a disproportionate number of those executed were from Iran's minorities, with at least 108 Baluch prisoners.

Israeli hackers loot Iran crypto stash

Hackers with possible links to Israel have drained more than USD 90 million from Nobitex, Iran's largest cryptocurrency exchange, according to blockchain analytics firms. The group claimed responsibility for the hack on Thursday leaked what it said was the company's full source code. Blockchain analytics firm Elliptic wrote said the attack likely was not financially motivated as the wallets the hackers had "effectively burned the funds in order to send Nobitex a political message". Nobitex's app and website were down as it assessed "unauthorised access". Elliptic said that relatives of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei were linked to the exchange.

2 Indians jailed for multi-million dollar scams in US

HOUSTON, 19 JUNE

Two Indian nationals studying in the United States have been sentenced to federal prison in separate but similar fraud cases targeting elderly Americans. Kishan Rajeshkumar Patel, 20, received 63 months after pleading guilty to money laundering conspiracy. Patel, on a student visa, posed as a US government official in phishing scams that defrauded at least 25 victims of nearly USD 2.7 million. He was arrested in Texas in August 2024 while attempting to collect USD 130,000. Co-defendant Dhruv Rajeshbhai Mangukiya has pleaded guilty and awaits sentencing. —*PTI*

Category-4 Hurricane Erick threatens Mexico

PUERTO ESCONDIDO, 19 JUNE

Hurricane Erick was upgraded to an "extremely dangerous" Category 4 storm and is set to strike southern Mexico's Pacific coast on Thursday morning, bringing destructive winds, heavy rain, and a dangerous storm surge. The eye is expected to make landfall between Puerto Escondido and Acapulco. With sustained winds of 145mph (230kmph), the storm threatens flash flooding and deadly mudslides. President Claudia Sheinbaum has urged residents to stay indoors or move to shelters. In Puerto Escondido, waves have already flooded coastal restaurants. Acapulco, still recovering from 2023's Hurricane Otis, is on high alert. Schools are closed, ports shut, and over 580 shelters are ready. —*PTI*

SpaceX rocket explodes during Texas test

AUSTIN, 19 JUNE

A SpaceX rocket exploded during a test at its Starbase facility in southern Texas late on Wednesday, sending a fireball high into the sky. The incident occurred around 11pm local time while the Starship vehicle was on the test stand ahead of its tenth flight. SpaceX confirmed the rocket had "experienced a major anomaly" but stated that a safety perimeter was in place and all staff were safe and accounted for. The company assured the public that there was no risk to nearby communities and urged people not to approach the site. —*PTI*

US resumes student visa; to scan social media accounts

WASHINGTON, 19 JUNE

The US State Department said on Wednesday it is restarting the suspended process for foreigners applying for student visas but all applicants will now be required to unlock their social media accounts for government review.

The department said consular officers will be on the lookout for posts and messages that could be deemed hostile to the United States, its government, culture, institutions or founding principles.

In a notice made public Wednesday, the department said it had rescinded its May suspension of student visa processing but said new applicants who refuse to set their social media accounts to "public" and allow them to be reviewed may be rejected.

A refusal could signal that they have something to hide in their online activity, it said.

The Trump administration last month temporarily halted the scheduling of new visa interviews for foreign students hoping to study in the US while preparing to expand the screening of their activity on social media, officials said.

In reopening the visa process, the State Department also told consulates to prioritise students hoping to enrol at colleges where foreigners make up less than 15 per cent of the student body, a US official source said.

Foreign students make up more than 15 per cent of the total student body at almost 200 US universities, according to an Associated Press analysis of federal education data from 2023.

Notably, the Trump administration had attempted to block foreign students from attending Harvard University, which relies on foreign students. Trump said Harvard should cap its foreign enrolment at 15 per cent. —*PTI*

Zelenskyy urges stronger response to Russia

KYIV, 19 JUNE

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Thursday said the Russian missile strike on a nine-storey apartment block in Kyiv proves that more pressure must be placed on Moscow for it to agree to a ceasefire.

The pre-dawn assault on Tuesday, the deadliest on Kyiv this year, killed 28 people and injured 142, according to Kyiv Military Administration head Tymur Tkachenko.

In the Solomianskyi district, a missile collapsed an apartment building, killing 23 residents.

Zelenskyy, along with Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko and Presidential Aide Andrii Yermak, laid flowers at the site. "This attack reminds the world that Russia chooses killing over peace," Zelenskyy said.

Russia fired over 440 drones and 32 missiles in the barrage.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, meanwhile, claimed he was open for talks with Zelenskyy, but repeated his assertion that he lost his legitimacy after his term expired last year — allegations rejected by Kyiv and its allies.

Putin also praised the US' push for peace in Ukraine, saying, "If Trump had been the President, the conflict indeed might not have erupted".

His comments come as Russia's Economic Minister said the country is on the brink of a recession. —*PTI*

Thai PM apologises for leaked phone call

BANGKOK, 19 JUNE

Thai PM Paetongtarn Shinawatra apologised on Thursday for the deepening political turbulence set off by a leaked recording of her negotiations with Cambodia's former leader in the two nations' latest border dispute.

Calls for her resignation grew after a major coalition partner pulled out and further destabilised the already rocky government led by her Pheu Thai Party. Paetongtarn has already been criticised for a perceived soft stance toward Cambodia, especially by right-wing nationalists.

Cambodia's Senate President Hun Sen posted the full, 17-minute photo call on his Facebook after a shorter version was leaked Wednesday. He said he recorded the conversation "to avoid any misunderstanding or misrepresentation in official matters".

In the recording, Paetongtarn was heard calling Hun Sen "uncle" as they discussed through translators whether they should lift border restrictions imposed after the deadly clash. Backlash revolved around her calling a Thai army commander in charge of the border area where the clash happened as "an opponent." Critics said she was trying to please Hun Sen too much and made Thailand look weak. —*PTI*

Thailand's Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra at a press meet in Bangkok on Thursday *PHOTO: PTI*

NZ halts funds to Cook Islands over its China ties

WELLINGTON, 19 JUNE

New Zealand has halted millions of dollars in funding to the Cook Islands over the "breadth and content" of agreements the smaller Pacific nation made with China, officials from the New Zealand Foreign Minister's office said on Thursday.

The NZ, which is the smaller Pacific nation's biggest funder, won't consider any new money for the Cook Islands until the ties improve.

Relations between other Pacific islands and their larger regional backers Australia and NZ have stumbled over ties with China in recent years as Beijing has vied to increase its Pacific sway.

But the latest move by the NZ government was striking because it reflected growing friction between two countries with strong constitutional ties over their diverging approaches to managing relations with Beijing. —*PTI*

Congo, Rwanda sign preliminary peace agreement

DAKAR, 19 JUNE

Representatives from Congo and Rwanda have signed the text of a peace agreement between the two countries in Washington, according to a joint press release from the two nations and the US State Department on Wednesday.

Congo has accused Rwanda of backing M23 rebels in the east of the country.

Experts at the United Nations say the rebels are supported by about 4,000 troops from the neighbouring nation.

The decades-long conflict escalated in January, when the M23 rebels advanced and seized the city of Goma, followed by the town of Bukavu in February.

"The Agreement includes provisions on respect for territorial integrity and a prohibition of hostilities; disengagement, disarmament, and conditional integration of non-state armed groups," said the statement posted to the State Department's website. —*PTI*

ROW OVER 'FROG EMBRYOS'

Harvard scientist caught 'smuggling' bio materials

BOSTON, 19 JUNE

Attorneys argued over whether a Harvard researcher accused of smuggling frog embryos brought "biological materials" into the US in a court hearing Wednesday.

Kseniia Petrova, a Russian-born scientist conducting cancer research for Harvard Medical School, appeared in Massachusetts federal court on Wednesday for a probable cause hearing, where government and defence attorneys argued over whether the frog embryos brought were "biological materials", ABC News reported.

She was returning from a vacation from France in February when she was questioned by US Customs and Border Protection at Boston Logan International Airport.

Petrova, 30, had stopped at a lab specialising in splicing superfine sections of frog embryos and obtained a package of samples for research. Federal officials accused her of lying about "carrying substances" into the country.

Kseniia Petrova, a Russian-born scientist conducting cancer research for Harvard Medical School, appeared in Massachusetts federal court Wednesday for a probable cause hearing *PHOTO: X*

She told The Associated Press in an interview in April that she did not know the items needed to be declared and was not trying to sneak anything into the country.

Petrova was told her visa was being cancelled and detained by immigration officials in Vermont after her initial arrest.

She filed a petition seeking her release and was briefly sent to an ICE facility in Louisiana, after which a judge ruled the immigration officers' actions were unlawful. In May, she was charged with one count of smuggling.

Homeland Security Investigations Brian Goldsworthy testified that Petrova would not have been able to leave the airport had she declared the frog embryos in her luggage. He said that Customs and Border Protection agriculture experts and a federal laboratory deemed the samples to be biological material.

Petrova's attorney argued it was unclear what definition the government was operating under.

If convicted of the smuggling charge, Petrova faces a sentence of up to 20 years in prison and a fine of up to $250,000. —*PTI*

SA calls floods a national disaster as toll rises to 92

BOSTON, 19 JUNE

South Africa was under a declared state of national disaster on Thursday as the death toll from floods caused by severe rains in the Eastern Cape region rose to 92.

The Eastern Cape government honoured the victims of last week's floods with a provincial Day of Mourning and a memorial service at King Sabatha Dalindyebo Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) College in Mthatha, one of the few schools whose infrastructure remained intact.

Speaking at the public memorial service, Zolile Williams, a member of the Executive Council, said the people of the coastal province have not been the same since the disaster hit, and many are now faced with the challenging task of rebuilding.

"Since 9 June, this province has been hit hard by unprecedented, catastrophic and unimaginable disasters," said Williams. "Since that day, the Eastern Cape has not been the same."

An extreme weather front brought heavy rain, strong winds and snow to parts of the province caused flooding in one of South Africa's poorest provinces last week, leaving dozens dead and roads, houses, schools and other infrastructure damaged.

At least two school children who were washed away in a bus are among the unverified number of missing persons according to local media reports, while thousands have since been displaced.

Authorities have appealed for residents to report missing people so rescuers could better understand how many people they were still looking for. —*PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Rupee falls 30P to 86.73 against USD

MUMBAI, 19 JUNE

The rupee declined for the third consecutive session, falling 30 paise to 86.73 against the US dollar on Thursday, pressured by a stronger dollar, rising crude oil prices, and geopolitical tensions. Opening at 86.54, the rupee saw high volatility, hitting an intraday low of 86.89. The currency has dropped 69 paise over three sessions. Analysts cited risk-averse sentiment, importer dollar demand, and muted domestic equities as key pressures. Brent crude rose 0.25% to $76.89 per barrel, adding to current account concerns. The dollar index was up 0.02% at 98.92, driven by safe-haven demand. Meanwhile, the US Fed held interest rates steady, despite political pressure for aggressive cuts. *—PTI*

JSW to seek shareholders' nod to raise ₹10,000 cr

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

JSW Energy will seek shareholders' approval for raising funds of up to Rs 10,000 crore in one or more tranches through the issuance of securities, in its annual general meeting on 11 July. In a regulatory filing, the company said it is exploring various avenues of business growth in line with its vision to achieve a target of 30 GW installed capacity and 40 GWh of storage capacity by FY 2030 and is pursuing various growth opportunities, including organic and inorganic opportunities. The growth and expansion plans may necessitate raising funds, it stated adding that the company will raise funds up to Rs 10,000 crore in one or more tranches through issuance of securities by way of private offerings and/or on preferential allotment basis and/or qualified institutions placement. *—PTI*

Realtor Kalpataru sets IPO price at ₹387-414/share

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

Real estate developer Kalpataru Ltd has set a price band of Rs 387–Rs 414 per share for its upcoming Rs 1,590 crore IPO, which opens for public subscription from 24–26 June, with anchor bidding starting 23 June. The IPO comprises entirely fresh equity; no Offer for Sale (OFS) component. At the upper band, the firm is valued at around Rs 8,500 crore. Proceeds will be used for debt repayment and general corporate purposes. Based in Mumbai, Kalpataru operates across the MMR, Pune, Hyderabad, and Noida, focusing on residential, commercial, and township projects. 75 per cent of the issue is for institutional buyers, 15 per cent for non-institutional, and 10 per cent for retail. Minimum bid is 36 shares. Listing is expected on 1 July on BSE and NSE. *—PTI*

Govt puts curbs on import of colloidal precious metals

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

The government has imposed import curbs on certain colloidal precious metals, with an aim to check the illegal inflow of gold into India in liquid form. Colloidal precious metals are suspensions of gold or silver nanoparticles dispersed in a liquid. According to industry experts, some importers were using this route for imports from countries like Thailand. Goods under this number include colloidal precious metals; inorganic or organic compounds of precious metals. In a separate notification, the Directorate said that the import of Palladium, Rhodium and Iridium alloy consisting of gold more than one per cent by weight is restricted. *—PTI*

Markets slide on third day amid geopolitical tensions

Fed move to keep rates unchanged dampens sentiments

MUMBAI, 19 JUNE

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended lower for the third straight session on Thursday, in line with weak trends in global markets as the ongoing Iran-Israel conflict continues to weigh on investors' sentiment.

The US Fed's decision to keep interest rates unchanged also dampened market sentiment, experts said.

In a largely volatile trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 82.79 points, or 0.10 per cent, to settle at 81,361.87. During the day, it hit a high of 81,583.94 and a low of 81,191.04, gyrating 392.9 points.

The 50-share NSE Nifty dipped 18.80 points or 0.08 per cent to 24,793.25.

From the Sensex firms, Adani Ports, Bajaj Finance, Tech Mahindra, IndusInd Bank, Nestle and Tata Steel were among the major laggards.

The BSE benchmark Sensex and the NSE' Nifty witnessed a largely volatile trade on Thursday *PHOTO: PTI*

In contrast, Mahindra & Mahindra, Titan, Larsen & Toubro, Bharti Airtel and Maruti were among the gainers.

In Asian markets, Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng settled in the negative territory, while South Korea's Kospi ended marginally higher.

European markets were trading lower in mid-session deals.

US markets ended on a mixed note on Wednesday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.26 per cent to USD 76.90 a barrel.

- In Asian markets, Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng settled in the negative territory, while South Korea's Kospi ended marginally higher

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 890.93 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) lapped up equities worth Rs 1,091.34 crore.

On Wednesday, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 138.64 points or 0.17 per cent to settle at 81,444.66.

The Nifty edged lower by 41.35 points or 0.17 per cent to settle at 24,812.05. *—PTI*

MIDDLE EAST CRISIS

Crude oil futures gain on spot demand

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

Crude oil prices on Thursday rose Rs 63 to Rs 6,397 per barrel in futures trade as participants increased their positions following a firm spot demand. On the Multi Commodity Exchange, crude oil for July delivery traded higher by Rs 63 or 0.99 per cent at Rs 6,397 per barrel in 8,943 lots.

Analysts said raising of bets by participants kept crude oil prices higher in futures trade. Globally, West Texas Intermediate crude was trading 0.27 per cent higher at USD 75.34 per barrel while Brent crude rose 0.29 per cent to USD 76.92 per barrel in New York.

In the international market, crude oil prices surged after Israel attacked Iranian nuclear sites in Natanz, adding to fears of a broader conflict in the Middle East that could disrupt crude supplies, reports said.

Brent crude futures rallied 1.05 per cent to USD 75.93 a barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate crude for August rose 0.74 per cent to $77.27 a barrel.

"Crude oil prices held near a five-month high as the conflict entered its seventh day. The main concern for the oil market is the Strait of Hormuz, a vital route for a fifth of global crude, though Tehran has so far shown no signs of disrupting shipments. Separately, the Federal Reserve kept interest rates steady but signaled two cuts by year-end, potentially supporting growth and boosting oil demand," said Jigar Trivedi, Senior Research Analyst at Reliance Securities.

Mehta Equities Ltd believes crude oil is having support at $72.50 - $71.90 and resistance at $73.85 - $74.50 in today's session. *—Agencies*

Amazon to infuse ₹2K cr in India to boost local ops

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

Amazon India has announced plans to invest over Rs 2,000 crore in 2025 to expand and upgrade its nationwide operations network. The move aims to improve delivery speed, operational efficiency, and employee well-being, according to a company release.

The investment will support the launch of new sites, upgrades to existing fulfilment centres, sortation hubs, and delivery stations. Amazon says this expansion will increase processing capacity and allow for faster, more reliable deliveries across all serviceable pin codes in India.

With India's booming e-commerce market, projected to grow at a CAGR of 21 per cent, reaching USD 325 billion by 2030, Amazon's announcement reinforces its commitment to long-term growth in the region.

PHOTO: ANI

The investment also includes a strong technology and sustainability focus, with energy-efficient buildings, improved cooling systems, and enhanced accessibility features. Facilities are being designed to ensure employee safety, comfort, and inclusion, particularly for people with disabilities.

Amazon continues to invest in on-road safety tools, including technology to monitor speeds and route complexity, and improve navigation for unstructured addresses. The company is also enhancing its driver app for better transparency, earnings visibility, and simplified workflows.

Key welfare programmes like 'Ashray' and 'Samridhi' are being expanded, offering rest points, financial education, and support services to delivery associates—even those outside Amazon's network. Additionally, over 80,000 delivery partners will receive free health check-ups by the end of 2025.

"These latest investments reflect our commitment to expanding operations while supporting our teams," said Abhinav Singh, VP – Operations, Amazon India & Australia. *—PTI*

Gold falls ₹150, silver plunges ₹1,000 amid weak global cues

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

Gold prices declined by Rs 150 to Rs 1,00,560 per 10g in the national capital on Thursday, tracking a fall in international prices, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The metal of 99.9 per cent purity had previously closed at Rs 1,00,710.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity also dropped by Rs 150 to Rs 99,800 per 10g, down from Rs 99,950 the previous day. Meanwhile, silver prices plunged Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,07,200 per kg, retreating from Wednesday's record high of Rs 1,08,200 per kg.

Globally, spot gold slipped to USD 3,365.90 per ounce, pressured by a firm US dollar and the Federal Reserve's decision to keep interest rates unchanged at 4.25–4.50

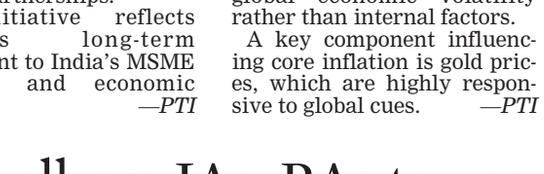
- AGlobally, spot gold slipped to USD 3,365.90 per ounce, pressured by a firm US dollar and the Federal Reserve's decision to keep interest rates unchanged at 4.25–4.50%

per cent. Markets had anticipated the move, but the Fed's stance on delaying any rate cuts added to the downward pressure on bullion.

Kaynat Chainwala, AVP at Kotak Securities, noted that gold prices weakened as the dollar stayed strong post-Fed announcement. Jateen Trivedi of LKP Securities said gold traded in a volatile range, with no near-term rate cut expected, although geopolitical tensions between Iran and Israel continue to support gold as a safe haven.

Spot silver declined by 1 per cent to USD 36.37 per ounce in international markets.

The US markets remained closed on Thursday in observance of Juneteenth. *—PTI*



Vedanta gave ₹4.5L cr to govt in 10 years

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

Anil Agarwal-led Vedanta Ltd has contributed Rs 4.5 lakh crore to the government exchequer over the last 10 years.

The company said it has "contributed Rs 4,48,830 crore to exchequer across its domestic and international operations over the past decade (FY15-16 to FY24-25)."

In FY25 alone, the company contributed Rs 55,349 crore (37 per cent of the consolidated revenue) through direct and indirect taxes, royalties, dividends, and other statutory payments. Of this, Rs 54,595 crore was contributed to the exchequer.

In India, Vedanta has operations in 15 states, with Rajasthan operations contributing Rs 25,436 crore and Odisha Rs 9,176 crore to the exchequer in FY25.

Vedanta Ltd, a subsidiary of Vedanta Resources, is one of the world's leading natural resources, critical minerals, energy and technology companies, spanning across India, South Africa, Namibia, Liberia, UAE, among others. *—PTI*

Walmart to add 1L MSMEs in India via Vriddhi programme

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

US retail giant Walmart will onboard 1 lakh more MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises) in India over the next three years under its Vriddhi supplier development programme, the company announced on Thursday.

The initiative, launched in 2019, has already supported over 70,000 MSMEs, offering access to digital commerce, mentorship, and market linkages. Walmart is now partnering with the Ideas to Impact Foundation (i2i) to expand the programme, providing MSMEs with tools for growth, sustainability, and export readiness.

The Vriddhi programme aims to connect Indian MSMEs to Walmart's global supply chain and Flipkart's e-commerce platform, helping them reach national and international markets. This aligns with Walmart's target of sourcing goods worth USD 10 billion per year from India by 2027.

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Jason Fremstad, SVP of Supplier Development - Sourcing at Walmart International, said the collaboration will strengthen MSMEs' ability to scale sustainably and contribute to India's digital economy. Walmart has also launched similar supplier initiatives in Mexico and the US.

Flipkart SVP and Chief Corporate Affairs Officer Rajneesh Kumar highlighted the company's "Samarth" initiative, which empowers artisans, weavers, and micro-enterprises through a dedicated platform on the Flipkart app.

Over the last two decades, Walmart has sourced over USD 30 billion in goods from India. Its sourcing basket includes toys, bicycles, pharmaceuticals, shoes, food, wellness products, and more, with a focus on expanding local supplier partnerships.

The initiative reflects Walmart's long-term commitment to India's MSME ecosystem and economic growth. *—PTI*

CRISIL says India's inflation declining

KOLKATA, 19 JUNE

Ratings agency CRISIL has reported that headline inflation, based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI), fell to 2.8 per cent in May 2025, signalling positive news for the Indian economy. The decline is primarily attributed to falling food inflation.

However, the report cautioned that core inflation—which excludes food and fuel—has now remained above 4 per cent for four consecutive months, despite being below the decadal average.

This persistent rise could begin to exert pressure on headline inflation, CRISIL warned.

While rising core inflation may indicate strengthening domestic demand, CRISIL noted that much of the increase appears driven by global economic volatility rather than internal factors.

A key component influencing core inflation is gold prices, which are highly responsive to global cues. *—PTI*

AIRPORT LOUNGE ACCESS

Banks may exit DreamFolks over service snags

MUMBAI, 19 JUNE

Major Indian banks, including ICICI Bank and Axis Bank, along with Mastercard, are reportedly planning to move away from aggregator DreamFolks Services Ltd, following service disruptions that impacted airport lounge access last year. Sources say more banks may follow.

On 22 September, 2024, DreamFolks experienced a temporary disruption, affecting lounge access for thousands of cardholders. Though resolved the next day, the incident pushed banks and card networks to consider direct partnerships with airport lounge operators, bypassing DreamFolks.

DreamFolks holds a 90 per cent share in India's domestic airport lounge aggregation market and works with major operators like Adani, GMR, and TFS, who manage over 80 per cent of lounge footfall. During the disruption, 49 lounges across 34 airports reportedly stopped accepting DreamFolks-linked access, prompting legal threats from Travel Food and Services.

PHOTO: ANI

Adani, which manages seven airports, blamed the disruption on DreamFolks' "unexpected suspension of services" and violation of agreements. Though DreamFolks claimed contractual compliance, banks such as American Express have since moved to Adani Digital for lounge access.

Founded in 2013, DreamFolks is a listed company that earns a significant portion of its revenue from airport lounges. In FY25, it reported Rs 1,292 crore in revenue (up 14 per cent), but saw a 5 per cent dip in net profit to Rs 65 crore. The company plans to diversify earnings through non-lounge services like food and beverages, spa and wellness, and airport transfers.

- DreamFolks holds a 90 per cent share in India's domestic airport lounge aggregation market and works with major operators like Adani, GMR, and TFS, who manage over 80 per cent of lounge footfall

The disruption has prompted several banks to consider direct integration with lounge operators, raising questions about DreamFolks' aggregator model going forward. *—PTI*

Sebi allows IAs, RAs to use liquid funds for deposit

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

Markets regulator Sebi has allowed Investment Advisers (IAs) and Research Analysts (RAs) to use liquid mutual funds and overnight funds as an alternative to bank fixed deposits to meet regulatory deposit requirements.

The move aims to address operational challenges in creating lien-marked FDs and promote ease of doing business. IAs and RAs had highlighted inconsistencies in third-party FD handling across bank branches. Sebi approved the proposal, noting that liquid and overnight funds are low-risk and allow lien marking within the securities market ecosystem, improving efficiency.

Mutual fund folios can be opened digitally or in demat form, with access through mobile or web platforms.

Sebi's December 2024 reforms replaced the net-worth requirement with a deposit mandate, eased qualification norms, and allowed fee collection up to one year in advance.

Additionally, Sebi introduced a one-time settlement scheme for Venture Capital Funds (VCFs) that failed to wind up schemes within the deadline. VCFs must first migrate to AIF regulations. Settlement fees range from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 6 lakh depending on the delay and unliquidated assets.

The last date to apply for the scheme is 19 January, Sebi said the scheme is designed to resolve past delays without impacting investors. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Sachin breaks silence on Pataudi Trophy row

NEW DELHI, 19 JUNE

Indian batting great Sachin Tendulkar on Thursday said he reached out to the family of late Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi as soon as he got to know that the India-England Test series trophy was being renamed and tried to ensure that the former captain's association with the marquee showdown remained intact.The Pataudi trophy has been replaced by the Anderson-Tendulkar trophy in honour of the Indian batting great and former England pacer James Anderson. Legendary Sachin Tendulkar and James Anderson formally unveiled the Anderson-Tendulkar Trophy ahead of the opening match of the five-Test series between India and England, here on Thursday.—*PTI*

Indian junior archers enter 5 finals at AC Stage 2

SINGAPORE, 19 JUNE

Indian junior archers continued their dominating run by storming into five team finals at the Asia Cup Stage 2 here on Thursday. The Indian men's recurve team, seeded second, defeated Bangladesh 5-1 in a one-sided semifinal to set up a summit clash with third seeds Japan. The trio of Vishnu Choudhary, Paras Hooda, and Juyel Sarkar dominated from the outset, taking the opening set 55-48. Although the second set was tied at 55-55, the Indians bounced back strongly against their fifth-seeded opponents, dropping just one point in the third set to win it 59-56 and seal the issue. In the recurve mixed team event, Vaishnavi Pawar and Vishnu Choudhary defeated Singapore's Tabitha Ern Lin Yeo and Yue Long Li 5-3 to enter the final.—*PTI*

Logo unveiled for men's FIH Hockey Junior WC in TN

CHENNAI, 19 JUNE

Tamil Nadu Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin on Thursday unveiled the official logo for the men's FIH Hockey Junior World Cup 2025 scheduled from 28 November to 10 December in the state. A memorandum of understanding was signed in Udhayanidhi's presence by the member secretary of SDAT, Meghanath Reddy, and Hockey India secretary general Singh, on the occasion of organising the international tournament in which 24 teams will vie for the top honours. Speaking on the occasion, Udhayanidhi said Chief Minister Stalin had sanctioned Rs 65 crore for the conduct of the 14th edition. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Real Madrid star Kylian Mbappe hospitalised

MIAMI, 19 JUNE

Real Madrid forward Kylian Mbappe has been hospitalized with an acute case of gastroenteritis, the Spanish club said Thursday. World Cup winner Mbappe missed Madrid's opening game at the Club World Cup against Saudi Arabian team Al Hilal in Miami on Wednesday because of a fever. Coach Xabi said he hoped the France international would be available for the team's next game against Pachuca on Sunday. But his hospitalization casts doubt over what part he might be able to play in the monthlong tournament in the United States."Our player Kylian Mbappé is suffering from an acute case of gastroenteritis and has been admitted to the hospital—*PTI*

New beginnings in Eng: Gill set to lead

Test series win in any SENA country bigger than IPL title, says Shubman Gill

LEEDS, 19 JUNE

Shubman Gill will be in the spotlight as a new-look India, without star batsmen Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, bid to end their 18-year wait for a Test series win in England.

A Test series win in England, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa ranks as a "bigger" achievement than an IPL title, said India's new captain Shubman Gill here on Thursday.

A new captain, a headstrong coach, a few from the old guard and some fresh faces will be determined to create a compelling narrative during the next 45 days when an in-transition India takes on an equally combustible England in a five-Test series for the Anderson-Tendulkar Trophy starting here on Friday. Only three Indian teams- Ajit Wadekar's batch of 1971, Kapil's Devils in 1986, and Rahul Dravid's sprightly bunch in 2007 have won a Test series in Old Blighty in the past nine decades, which doesn't make for a rosy picture.Neither does the fact that India's most devoted long-format cricketer of the past decade, Virat Kohli, has walked into Test sunset, making the batting line-up look slightly thin on experience.For the 25-year-old Shubman Gill, this series will be nothing short of baptism by fire against an England side, which has changed the conventions of Test match batting under McCullum's coaching and Ben Stokes' captaincy. Gill's selection as India's 37th Test captain was more about what one could expect of him rather than what he has done as a batter. —*PTI*

Shubman Gill with team India PHOTO: PTI

INDIA VS ENGLAND

HEAD TO HEAD	
PLAYED:	36
ENG Won:	17
INDIA Won:	11
DRAWN SERIES	8

INDIA vs ENG Match starts at 3.30 pm IST

Ben Stokes unfazed by Bumrah threat ahead of Leeds Test

LEEDS, 19 JUNE

England Test captain Ben Stokes has played down the threat posed by Jasprit Bumrah, insisting his side has "no fear" of the Indian pace ace ahead of the first Test at Headingley, which kicks off on June 20.

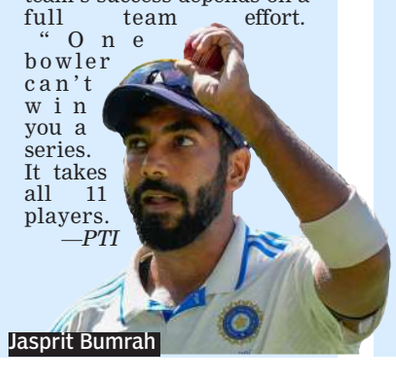
Bumrah, currently ranked the world's No. 1 Test bowler, boasts a stellar record against England — 60 wickets in 14 matches at an average just above 22 — and has consistently troubled top-order batters like Joe Root, Ollie Pope, and even Stokes himself. Known for his mastery with the Dukes ball, Bumrah's presence is expected to be key to India's hopes of winning the series despite the fact will not take part in all five Tests. Still, Stokes isn't rattled.

"No fear. In international cricket, you're constantly up against world-class players. We know Bumrah's quality and what he brings, but fear isn't part of our mindset," Stokes said in the pre-match media interaction.

Although Bumrah was India's top performer during their last Test series in Australia, the team still came up short due to collective underperformance, especially with the bat. Stokes pointed out that the team's success depends on a full team effort.

"One bowler can't win you a series. It takes all 11 players. —*PTI*

Ben Stokes



Jasprit Bumrah

Rahul lauds childhood buddy Karun Nair's resolve

LEEDS, 19 JUNE

Senior batter K L Rahul is quite excited about Karun Nair's return to India's Test fold in the five-match series against England starting here on Friday, as he believes that his childhood teammate has displayed commendable resolve while dealing with the hardships of being left out in the past.

Nair and Rahul, both 33, have played age-group cricket together since their childhood and are close friends. While Rahul has been a part of the Indian set-up, Nair endured a prolonged eight-year snub despite a good Test beginning, including a triple hundred against England.

"We started playing cricket as 11-year-old boys together, and we have been on this journey ever since. Both of us have had our ups and downs. He got his opportunity, scored a triple hundred, faced a bit of tough time after that for a lot of reasons," Rahul told IPL side Delhi Capitals' media team after the season that concluded earlier this month.

"But what has stood out is the way he has performed in the last 2-3 years," he added, referring to Nair's stellar run for Karnataka in the domestic circuit.

Rahul said Nair relied on going "back to basics" during his time away from international cricket.

"We have spoken about his time in the UK and him having played County cricket, and the difficulties and the challenges that he faced. "To have that drive to make a comeback to the Indian team despite all the hardships is commendable. I hope both of us can play for a very long time for the Indian team," he said.—*PTI*

The Indian women's tennis team will compete in the Billie Jean King Cup Playoffs in Bengaluru in November PHOTO: AITA

Bengaluru to host Billie Jean King Cup play-offs

BENGALURU, 19 JUNE

Karnataka State Lawn Tennis Association (KSLTA) will host the prestigious Billie Jean King Cup Playoffs in Bengaluru at the SM Krishna Tennis Stadium.

The Playoffs will feature 21 nations split into seven groups of three teams each. In a unique format, every group tie will be hosted by a nation, and the venues were formally announced following a draw held today in London.

The Playoffs are scheduled to begin on 14th November 2025, with Bengaluru set to host on 14th, 15th, and 16th November.

This will be the first time that the Billie Jean King Cup Playoffs will be held on Indian soil. India recently qualified for the Playoffs, only for the second time in its history, following a spectacular performance in the Asia/Oceania Group I tie held in Pune. India qualified along with New Zealand for the playoff, following its 2-1 win over Korea. Both New Zealand and India had four wins each in the six-team competition. The only other time India qualified for the playoffs was in April 2021 when they played in Latvia, which saw Jelena Ostapenko lead her team to a 3-1 victory over India.

KSLTA has been at the forefront of hosting international tennis events and have been a host to Davis Cup ties, ATP World Doubles Championships, WTA Tour Events, ITF Women's $100K, ATP Challengers, ITF World Tennis Tour events and this would also be a first for KSLTA to host the prestigious Billie Jean King Cup.

In their endeavour to provide invaluable exposure to young players and fans across the country, the leadership at KSLTA bid to host the Billie Jean King Cup play-offs when India qualified last month.

India are in group G along with Slovenia and the Netherlands. The five-member Indian team that featured in the qualifiers included Ankita Raina (rank 292), Sahaja Yamalapalli (rank 301), Shrivalli Bhamidipaty (rank 313) who is current India No.1, Vaidehi Chaudhari (rank 405) and Prarthana Thombare, the top-ranked Indian doubles player ranked no.136. —*PTI*

GALLE TEST

Pathum Nissanka's career-best 187 takes Sri Lanka to 368-4

GALLE, 19 JUNE

A career-best 187 by the stylish Pathum Nissanka led Sri Lanka to 368-4 in its first innings on the third day of the opening test against Bangladesh on Thursday.

That left the home team 127 runs adrift of Bangladesh, which had piled up a total of 495 all out.

On a featherbed surface, Nissanka produced an innings of sublime timing and poise, the sort that makes connoisseurs purr and opponents wince.

Nissanka, whose two previous test hundreds had come overseas, finally notched his maiden century on home soil.

A double hundred looked not just probable, but inevitable. Alas, as it so often does in cricket, the second new ball brought about his downfall.

A touch too eager to assert, Nissanka offered a drive too early, left a gap between bat and pad, and was clean bowled by Hasan Mahmud.

"I was disappointed with the way I got out," Nissanka said. "I knew I had to see off the new ball. I thought the shot was on, but it was a good piece of bowling as well.

"We have been conscious about the run rate. We knew we were not scoring too quickly in the last cycle of the World Test Championship. That is one of the things we wanted to address.

"I hope we have done that sufficiently in this test match, and we look to keep doing that moving forward."

Debutant Lahiru Udara, also looking assured during a brisk 29 off 34 balls, peppered the boundary with six well-timed fours before offering a return catch to Taijul Islam off a leading edge.

Dinesh Chandimal then stitched together a 157-run stand for the second wicket with Nissanka, his 54 oozing class until a faint tickle down the leg side off Nayeem Hasan ended his stay.

Sri Lanka 368 for 4 (Nissanka 187, Chandimal 54, Mathews 39, Mominul 1-24) trail Bangladesh 495 by 127 runs. —*PTI*

Pathum Nissanka

Petra Kvitova announces she will retire in September

LONDON, 19 JUNE

Two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova plans to retire in a few months, the Czech player said Thursday.

The announcement on social media came a day after Kvitova was granted a wild card for Wimbledon.

"I am excited and very much looking forward to soaking in the beauty of playing The Championships, Wimbledon one more time, a place that holds the most cherished memories in my career," Kvitova said.

"And while I am not entirely sure yet what my hardcourt swing in the US will look like, I am intending to finish my active playing career at the US Open in New York later this summer." —*PTI*

SALZBURG DEFEATS PACHUCA 2-1 IN TENSE CLUB WC CUP OPENER

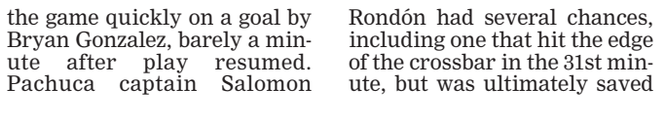
CINCINNATI, 19 JUNE

Karim Onisiwo scored a tiebreaking goal in the 76th minute to lead FC Salzburg to a 2-1 victory over CF Pachuca in a Club World Cup Group H game on Wednesday night.

Oscar Gloukh, a 21-year-old midfielder, scored in the 42nd minute for Salzburg in a game played in front of a crowd of 5,282 at TQL Stadium.

The game was delayed more than an hour after the start of the second half due to lightning in the area.Pachuca tied the game quickly on a goal by Bryan Gonzalez, barely a minute after play resumed. Pachuca captain Salomon Rondón had several chances, including one that hit the edge of the crossbar in the 31st minute, but was ultimately saved by the 18-year-old goalkeeper Christian Zawieschitzky, who was making his Salzburg debut.

The attendance was a major drop compared to Sunday's Bayern-Auckland match that drew a crowd of 21,152.Key moment Salzburg substituted Onisiwo for Edmund Baidoo in the second half, and he wound up scoring the winning goal.TakeawaysWith the 2-1 victory, Salzburg rose to the top of Group H heading into its match against Al Hilal on Sunday. —*PTI*



Karim Onisiwo scores a tiebreaking goal in the 76th minute PHOTO: X/@FCRBS_EN

PARIS DIAMOND LEAGUE

Chopra seeks first major title of season

PARIS, 19 JUNE

Having breached the 90m mark, two-time Olympic medallist Neeraj Chopra would now be eyeing a top finish when he goes up against familiar rivals in the prestigious Paris Diamond League on Friday in a star-studded field here.

Chopra, German ace Julian Weber, and two-time world champion Anderson Peters of Grenada will be among eight competitors vying for top honours in the second DL meeting of the season, featuring men's javelin throw on the roster.

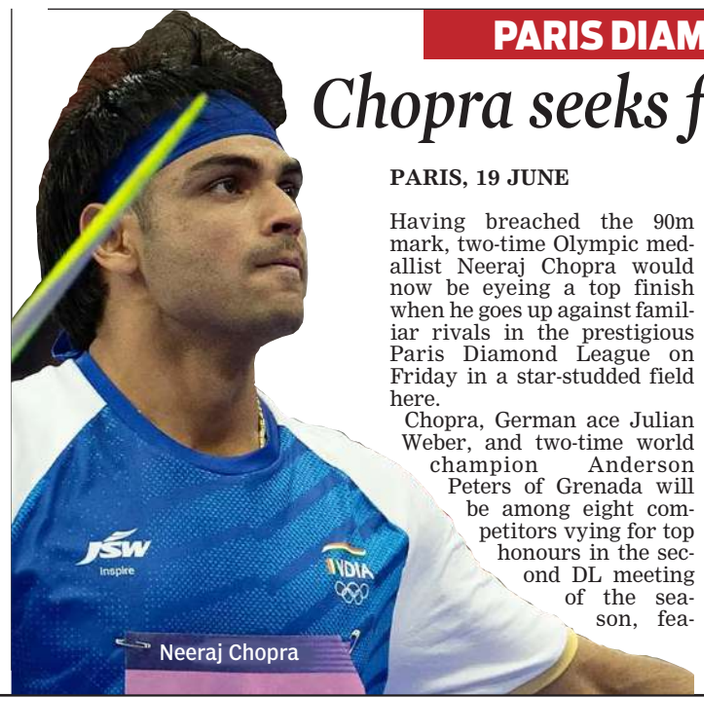
Five of the listed throwers have hit the 90m mark.Weber had upstaged Chopra in the Doha DL on May 16 after the Indian superstar finally breached the elusive 90m mark.

Weber had recorded 91.06m with his last throw to trump Chopra, who had sent his spear to a distance of 90.23m in the same event.

The 31-year-old Weber had also beaten Chopra at the Janusz Kusocinski Memorial meet on May 23 in Poland where both performed below their best under chilly and overcast conditions. Weber had produced 86.12m while Chopra could only come up 84.14m to finish second.Peters was there in the field too at both the Doha DL and the Poland event.

He had finished third in both.In Paris, Chopra would look to upstage Weber after finishing second in back-to-back competitions as he returns to the French capital after eight years for a Diamond League competition.

Chopra had skipped the Paris DL last year in order to focus on the Olympic Games where he took the silver with a throw of 89.45m. He last competed in the Paris DL in 2017 as a junior world champion and finished fifth with a throw of 84.67m.In the eight-man field at the Charlety Stadium on Friday. —*PTI*



Neeraj Chopra

Inter Miami break silence on Lionel Messi's fitness

DUBAI, 19 JUNE

Inter Miami coach Javier Mascherano said Lionel Messi would be fit to face Porto at the Club World Cup on Thursday, despite showing signs of discomfort in training.

A video emerged of Messi touching his left leg during the session on Wednesday, but Mascherano confirmed the veteran forward was ready for Miami's second Group A match in Atlanta.

"On the trip from Miami to Atlanta, I saw that he came out in some places, but Leo is fit, he trained, he completed the whole session," Mascherano told reporters. "He was touching his leg, sometimes people touch themselves, but there's no problem, he's fit and he will play tomorrow." The coach said Messi's former Barcelona team-mate Jordi Alba was available after missing the opening 0-0 draw against Al Ahly due to injury.

"We'll evaluate what's best for us, if he starts or not," said the coach. "I already know, but I won't tell you." Mascherano, meanwhile, said retaining possession would be the key against Portugal's Porto. —*PTI*

Lionel Messi